



THE PONCA CITY NEWS

PONCA CITY, OKLAHOMA

Giant Leafy Lessons Offered By Free Elementary Program

Take a bunch of third graders. Give them a free cabbage plant and a few instructions. Then turn them loose to play in the dirt. The rewards? For the 150 Oklahoma elementary schools participating in the free gardening program, the "paydirt" is giving students a lesson in where food comes from, the value of agriculture in general and gardening in particular.

Giant Leafy Lessons:

The national Bonnie Plants cabbage-growing program illustrates the best form of teaching — making learning fun and engaging. It provides third grade students enjoyable lessons on plants, patience and perseverance as they attempt to grow the biggest cabbage in their state.

Students participating in the Bonnie Plants Third Grade Cabbage Program receive a free Bonnie O.S. Cross — an "oversized" cabbage plant — to cultivate, nurture and grow. These cabbages often grow bigger than a basketball and can weigh up to 50 pounds.

At the end of the season, teachers from each class select the student who has grown the best cabbage, based on size and appearance. A picture of the cabbage and the student entry is submitted to Bonnie Plants by mail or online. That student's name is then included in a statewide drawing to receive a \$1,000 education scholarship. A random drawing conducted by a representative from each state's Department of Agriculture then determines the winner of each state. Last year, 1.5 million students participated in 45 states.

Getting It Growing:

Growing a colossal cabbage may seem like a giant undertaking for little kids, but it's easier than you think.

All you need is:

- * **Sunshine:** Cabbages need at least 6 hours of full sunlight per day- more if possible.
- * **Space:** The Bonnie OS Cabbages need at least three feet on each side to spread out.
- * **Soil:** Some compost should be worked into the soil- cabbages love nutrient rich soil.
- * **Food:** An all-purpose vegetable plant food will provide a good start for the cabbage. Then feed every 10 days to keep it growing strong and healthy.
- * **Water:** Cabbage needs at least an inch of rainfall each week. No rain? A watering can or garden hose will give the plant the water it needs.
- * **TLC:** Weeds must be kept out of the cabbage patch. They compete for food and water the cabbage needs to grow. Brown or white moths are also unwanted guests — they come from worms that love to munch on cabbage.
- * **Time:** In 10 to 12 weeks, children should have a huge head of cabbage. Green thumbs can pay off, providing participating children with pride, a humongous cabbage, and for the lucky state winner — the beginning of an educational fund for college.

To see the 2009 winners and learn more about the 2010 contest, visit www.bonnieplants.com.

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