

Get Growing

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Lillian Hladovcak likes to garden. But even she wasn't prepared for the size of her harvest.

"I was very surprised it got so big," she said.

As part of a project for her third-grade class at Grand Ridge Elementary School, Lillian, as well as her classmates, planted a cabbage plant provided by Bonnie Plants, which has a facility north of Ottawa.

The company gave more than 2,000 similar plants to 86 participating schools in Illinois as part of a national campaign to teach students about gardening. The cabbage plants are given to third-graders who grow the plants over the summer, then bring a photo of their cabbage back to their teacher at the end of the contest.

The photo of the top cabbage from each school is then sent to Bonnie Plants. Those photos are put in a hat for a random drawing in each state to see who wins first prize. This year, Lillian's cabbage won — but not without plenty of hard work.

Lillian's family has had a garden as long as she can remember, usually planting green beans, corn, tomatoes and carrots, among other vegetables.

"It's fun," she said. "And you get to be outside. (The vegetables) taste better."

And though cabbage isn't always a staple in the family garden, Lillian just added her cabbage plant to the plot and took care of it over the summer.

"We put Sevin on it to keep the bugs away and we have really good soil," she said. "And you need to



Photo: Provided

Lillian Hladovcak is pictured with her prize-winning cabbage, which weighed in at 20 pounds with the outer leaves and had a 13-pound head. She won a \$1,000 savings bond from Bonnie Plant.



Photo: Melissa Garzanelli

Lillian Hladovcak (front) is pictured with her award following the March 18 presentation from Bonnie Plants. Also pictured are (from left) Director of the Illinois Department of Agriculture Thomas Jennings, grandmother Barbara, father Raymond, brother Steven, mother Shasta, brother Raymond III, Alisha Finlayson of Bonnie Plants and Kara Ericzon, third-grade teacher at Grand Ridge.

water it — but not too much."

When it was time to harvest, the cabbage weighed in at a whopping 20 pounds with the outer leaves and had a 13-pound head. Of all the cabbages entered, Grand Ridge teacher Kara Ericzon chose Lillian's to enter into the contest, sending in a photo of her with her plant.

She was surprised when she learned this winter that Lillian, now in fourth grade, was the winner.

"It's a good program," she said. "I'd never heard of anyone winning, let alone someone from our small community."

Lillian was honored during a presentation at her school March 18 by Bonnie Plants with a \$1,000 savings bond and by Thomas Jennings, director of the Illinois Department of Agriculture, who presented her and her family with tickets to the Illinois State Fair to attend on Agriculture Day.

"She's done a really good job," Jennings said during the presentation. "She is a prime example of what everyone in this room needs to do — get involved with gardening."

Bonnie Plants crafted the program, "Getting It Growing," about 10 years ago to teach students about gardening. This year's batch of cabbage plants for third-graders will soon be available for new growers to try their hand at growing a colossal cabbage.

"It's a great opportunity to get kids started in gardening and help them get interested in it," said Alisha Finlayson, who presented Lillian with her award. Her husband, Blake Finlayson, is the station manager at Ottawa's Bonnie Plants facility.

As for Lillian and her family, they plan on having a garden again this year.

"It teaches them about where their food comes from," said Lillian's mother, Shasta. "That it doesn't just come from the grocery store. It gives them some perspective."

Tips for growing a colossal cabbage

Bonnie Plants provides students with some tips for growing cabbage as part of its "Getting It Growing" program:

- **Sunshine:** Cabbages need at least six hours of full sunlight per day, even more if possible.
- **Space:** Cabbages need at least three feet on each side to spread out.
- **Soil:** Compost should be worked into the soil. Cabbages love nutrient-rich soil.
- **Food:** All-purpose vegetable plant food will provide a good start for the cabbage. Then feed it every 10 days to keep it growing.
- **Water:** Cabbages need at least an inch of rainfall per week. If no rain, water them with a watering can or a garden hose.
- **Care:** Weeds must be kept out of the cabbage patch because they compete with the plant for food and water. Brown or white moths are also unwanted guests; they come from worms that like to eat the cabbage leaves.
- **Time:** It takes about 10 to 12 weeks to grow a huge head of cabbage.