

April 2011

TAMPA BAY
Parenting

FREE

away to
grow
The benefits of camp

cool
to be
kind
A lesson in civility

good
earth
School gardens sprouting

DAYS OF SUMMER
A GUIDE TO BAY AREA CAMPS





good earth

SCHOOL
GARDENS
NOURISH
MIND, BODY

BY KRAYL
FUNCH

School gardens date to 1811 or even further. But that's no surprise considering you couldn't just jump in your car and head to the nearest grocery store for fruits and vegetables.

However, in the Tampa Bay area, several schools are continuing the tradition of school gardens, including at Learning Gate Community School in Lutz and Robles Elementary in Tampa.

The schools see the importance of the programs and are finding ways to incorporate them into their curriculum with the help of students, parents and businesses.

Learning Gate is a charter school whose mission is to prepare students to participate in their family, school and community, through an educational program that promotes academic excellence, community service and environmental responsibility.

Michele Northrup, who is in charge of the public relations and among the parents who worked to create the garden in 2006, is proud of the program.

"I love seeing the pride on the faces of our students as they work in the garden, she says. "We collect our harvest for our local food

bank and our students feel empowered by helping others." The majority of the vegetables are harvested and donated to Feeding America Tampa Bay.


Depending on grade level, each student can spend up to two hours per week in the garden taking care of the plants or perhaps tending to the chickens and bunny that are on the campus.

Robles was lacking funds not enthusiasm and support of youth garden, recently winning the 2011 Burpee Home Gardens' I Can Grow Youth Garden Award. Selected from more than 220 community and urban schools, its support of youth gardening and development of an in-depth plan for comprehensive youth-centered educational programs that emphasize nutrition and food production, environmental awareness, social responsibility and scholastic integration was a deciding factor.

The school will receive up to 500 vegetable and herb plants, \$2,500 toward garden supplies, allowing the school to build 10 raised beds, rain barrels and benches, five gallons of organic-based plant food, one hose-end sprayer, on-site layout and installation assistance from Burpee Home Gardens experts and a camera to document the garden's success.

"For years, the teachers at Robles Elementary

continued on the next page



School have been passionate about gardening and developing an outdoor learning environment for our students,” says Christine Danger, science resource teacher. “Our outdoor learning environment began with the donation of a cement slab, two picnic tables and an elm tree, and receiving this award will not only allow us to begin a much-anticipated garden, but also bring powerful hands-on learning, wonder and joy to our students and staff.”

“We received an overwhelming number of quality applications from across the nation for the second annual I Can Grow program, and it was difficult to select the winners,” said George Ball, chairman and CEO. “The growing popularity of the program demonstrates the increasing value and interest in home vegetable gardening among younger and novice gardeners.”

Discovering food growing on a plant before it reaches grocery store shelves is a new experience for many students at Robles. For the 630 students in this urban, high-poverty school, gardening will assist in making the connection between life sciences taught in the classroom and the foods consumed daily.

Working with the Southwest Florida Water Management District, Robles will use its garden as a tool for teaching students about the water cycle, water conservation, landscaping and rain barrels.

The Burpee Home Gardens’ I Can Grow program launched in 2010. The company is the largest garden company in North America, offering seeds, garden plants and gardening supplies at www.burpee.com.

The Home Depot Garden Club works closely with the National Gardening Association’s Youth Garden Grant and is the sponsor for 2011. For more than 25 years, NGA’s Youth Garden Grants program has helped more than 1.3 million youngsters reap rewards and vital life lessons from working in gardens and habitats. NGA awards Youth Garden Grants to schools and community organizations with child-centered garden programs. Visit www.garden.org to learn more.

There are hundred’s of community and national grants available for school gardens. Do your research and your child’s school could be the next to reap the vast benefits of connecting with nature, knowing where our food comes from and the value of growing your own dinner.

In the end, the founder of the children’s school farm at DeWitt Clinton Park in New York may have summed up the value of school gardens best. “I did not start a garden to grow a few vegetables and flowers. The garden was used as a means to teach them in their work some necessary civic virtues, private care of public property, economy, honesty, application, concentration, self-government, civic pride, justice, the dignity of labor and the love of nature.”