

FEATURE STORY

Kids DIG Gardens



Anna, Ruby, Tilly and Jack at the Lochiel Park Community Garden

Tending to veggie patches is growing in popularity among Adelaide's children, writes Linda Wyrill.

Adelaide's children are getting involved in the practice of growing their own food – in schools, in the wider community and in their own backyards.

Going green with your kids doesn't have to be a daunting process. It can be as easy as visiting the farmers market on a Sunday morning. The Kids' Club at the Adelaide Showground Farmers Market started in 2008, with a grant from Health SA. On the first Sunday of each month, children aged four and over can help care for the vegetable beds and fruit trees that make up the Kids' Club Edible Garden at the markets. As well as sowing seeds, caring for plants and harvesting produce, children go on bug and slug hunts, build scarecrows and get involved in other fun activities that help them discover what is growing in the garden at the time of their visit – or what is not growing, and why.

On other Sundays, kids can road-test the produce in the Kids' Club kitchen. 'Cooking with Steph' sessions are on the fourth Sunday of each month from 10am, and allow children to prepare, cook and eat food grown in the garden. "We want it to be a pleasurable experience

for them" says Steph McLeod, coordinator of the Kids' Club. "We talk about food miles and 'ugly' fruit and veg – real food." By 'real food' she means locally grown, preservative-free food that may sport some blemishes. McLeod hopes that through initiatives such as Kids' Club, the next generation will be empowered to make healthy and community-minded decisions about where their food comes from. As she says, "The proof's in the tasting!" Children leave the Kids' Club kitchen with content tummies and smiles on their faces.

Adelaide's preschools are going green too. At Hackney Kindergarten, children love tending their two vegetable patches, says director Robyn Molyneux. The governing council (made up of parents) helped set up the veggie beds. "Many parents and grandparents grow vegetables, so it gets the whole family involved," says Molyneux. "It is lovely when family and community members come in to work with the children or help them to plant."

From a developmental perspective, Molyneux says that children love to do real work that has a purpose. "This type of learning encompasses so much," she says. "Nature is a strong interest for children, and learning branches off into many different areas." For example there are science discussions, as children predict what will grow, and why.

'Going green' promotes peer learning and a sense of community. The garden has a magnetic effect – everyone wants a go. Older children help the younger ones.

in a pot give children the opportunity to care for and nurture a natural environment. "It's the process not the product that matters," says Wahlstrom. It doesn't matter if carrots come out crooked, she says. What matters is the development that takes place as children are responsible for something. "Hopefully they take that environmental responsibility into the world as adults."

Some of Adelaide's primary-school students are also growing their own food. At Aldinga Beach R-7 School, 'edible' gardens and a Kids Kitchen are in full swing, thanks to a grant from the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation (a national program). More than 10 schools in the Adelaide and Hills regions have kitchen gardens set up through the

foundation. Children aged eight to 12 are involved in weekly gardening and kitchen classes aimed at developing positive lifelong attitudes towards food and healthy eating habits.

For many children, vegetable gardens are as familiar at home as they are at school. Eighteen months ago, Marie Carter and her family, including three daughters under the age of five, moved into Adelaide's 'eco village' – Lochiel Park in Campbelltown. "We liked the idea of helping the environment with our everyday living," says Carter. Among the many sustainable features of the village is the community vegetable garden, which includes shared veggie beds, herbs and lots of fruit trees. Residents can also rent their own plot. Carter's family use their 3x2m patch to grow broccoli, carrots, salad leaves, tomatoes and other seasonal produce. She says that her children love learning how food grows and seeing what happens once they plant a seed. "They also spend more time outdoors and enjoy the social aspect of the community garden."

You don't have to live in an eco village to go green. The suburban backyard of James and Kristin Rivett, and their two young children, has fruit trees, chooks, vegetable beds, pockets of permaculture and food grown in pots. All this is among a 'normal-looking yard' with a trampoline and a patch of lawn for the kids to play on. "The kids

understand where food comes from. "When they get involved in the whole process of growing food they have a better appreciation of its true value," he says.

"Growing your own' may be the way of the future. It may be an important thing to do for the environment. But for kids, it's also good honest fun. And as five-year-old Ruby says, "It tastes great, especially the carrots!" •

For further information visit:

- www.asfm.org.au (Adelaide Showground Farmers Market website)
- www.kitchengardenfoundation.org.au
- www.lochielpark.com.au
- aldingakitchengarden.blogspot.com

Adelaide's child

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