

# St. Ann School



## St. Ann Learning Garden Program

### *Learning With Dirty Hands*

Learning comes alive in a school garden! All subjects can be taught in this dynamic hands-on environment. From reading to science, math to nutrition, it's all possible. With clipboards as desks, and the garden as their classroom, students' textbook lessons come to life as butterflies metamorphose, worms decompose, plant growth is recorded, fresh corn is eaten, and sensory poetry is created.

The "St. Ann Garden"

has been an exciting addition to the school's curriculum. Just three blocks away, students are able to learn using all their senses in ways not possible in a typical classroom. The garden engages students by providing a dynamic environment in which they observe, discover, experiment, nurture, and learn. Through the garden, stu-

dents gain an understanding of ecosystems, an appreciation for food origins and nutrition, knowledge of plant and animal life cycles, and a sensual experience of God's glorious creation.



### *We Are What We Eat*

How many times have you heard the phrase "You are what you eat?" Stop and think about the importance of that statement. What we eat plays a large role in how we develop and grow. It

also influences our health, energy levels and attitudes. Learning about good nutrition is a part of our curriculum; from our Health and Fitness classes to the cafeteria menu. Working in

the garden makes our students more aware of where our food comes from and the need to choose foods that are healthy for eating and for the environment.

## *What is a Learning Garden?*



*Third graders snacking on their bountiful harvest of cucumbers and tomatillos.*

A school garden is an innovative teaching tool and strategy that lets educators incorporate hands-on activities through interdisciplinary, multi-sensory lessons. The garden engages students by providing a dynamic environment in which to observe, discover, experiment, and nurture. It is a living

laboratory where lessons are drawn from real-life experiences rather than textbook examples, allowing students to become active participants in the learning process.

Through the garden, students gain an understanding of ecosystems, an appreciation for food origins

and nutrition, and knowledge of plant and animal life cycles. At the same time, they learn practical horticultural skills that last. Learning gardens turn academic information into practical skills. Students put scientific lessons to the test by observing and experimenting in the garden world.

## *Where Did School Gardens Come From?*

**Of all the wonderful things in the wonderful universe of God, nothing seems to me more surprising than the planting of a seed in the blank earth and the result thereof.**

The school garden movement originated in Europe and arrived in the United States in the 1890s. Gardens sprang up at schools all over the country during the early 20th century, with particular booms as

Victory Gardens intended to increase the food supply. During the 1950s, the number of gardens decreased as schools placed more emphasis on technology. More recently, the popularity of school

gardens as an educational tool has steadily grown as a way to teach healthy eating behaviors and a way to incorporate and increase hands-on learning experiences.



## *It's Gotten Rotten*

Gardening and composting go hand-in-hand, especially in school garden projects: gardening without composting only teaches half the lesson.

Composting concerns the invisible half of the

Wheel of Life, Nature's cycle of growth and decay. This is the vital part that happens underground, where wastes decay to give rise to new life. Composting helps to ensure a bountiful, beautiful and healthy garden.

Our First Grade is experimenting with classroom composting and is laying the groundwork for a school wide initiative. Plans are to begin composting our cafeteria food waste in the near future.



## Why Garden with Kids?

Educational philosophers have promoted the use of gardening to achieve learning objectives and support the mental, emotional, and social development of youth. Students enjoy gardening activities, and teachers and parents say that gardening programs:

- Address multiple learning styles
- Provide opportunities for interdisciplinary lessons
- Improve environmental attitudes
- Promote good nutrition & exercise
- Teach patience and responsibility
- Instill a positive work ethic
- Increase students' self-esteem
- Build classroom relationships, improve teamwork, and strengthen school spirit
- Beautify the environment



## Stewardship of God's Creation

A school garden is a powerful environmental education tool. Through gardening, students become responsible caretakers. They have an opportunity to engage in agricultural practices on a small scale, learning about the responsibilities and impacts of land cultivation. They explore the web of interactions among living and non-living components of life. By doing so, they develop a greater understanding of the natural world.

Students also learn the importance of caring for natural resources. They

will observe that choosing the right plants results in a beautiful landscape that is also environmentally friendly.

Additionally, gardens teach about waste reduction through composting. Students who learn sustainable garden practices can more readily consider conservation issues from a local and global perspective.

For many children, a garden offers the only chance to get close to nature. Some lack access to gardening spaces because of their living situations; others

have limited exploratory free time outdoors. School garden educators in urban environments frequently find their programs provide students their first opportunity to dig into the soil and watch a plant grow. Establishing a connection with nature at an early age is extremely important. In urban areas where green spaces are limited, gardening programs for children can provide a strong enough connection to instill appreciation and respect for nature in adulthood.

**"We are part of the earth and it is part of us...What befalls the earth befalls all the sons of the earth."**

**Chief Seattle 1852**

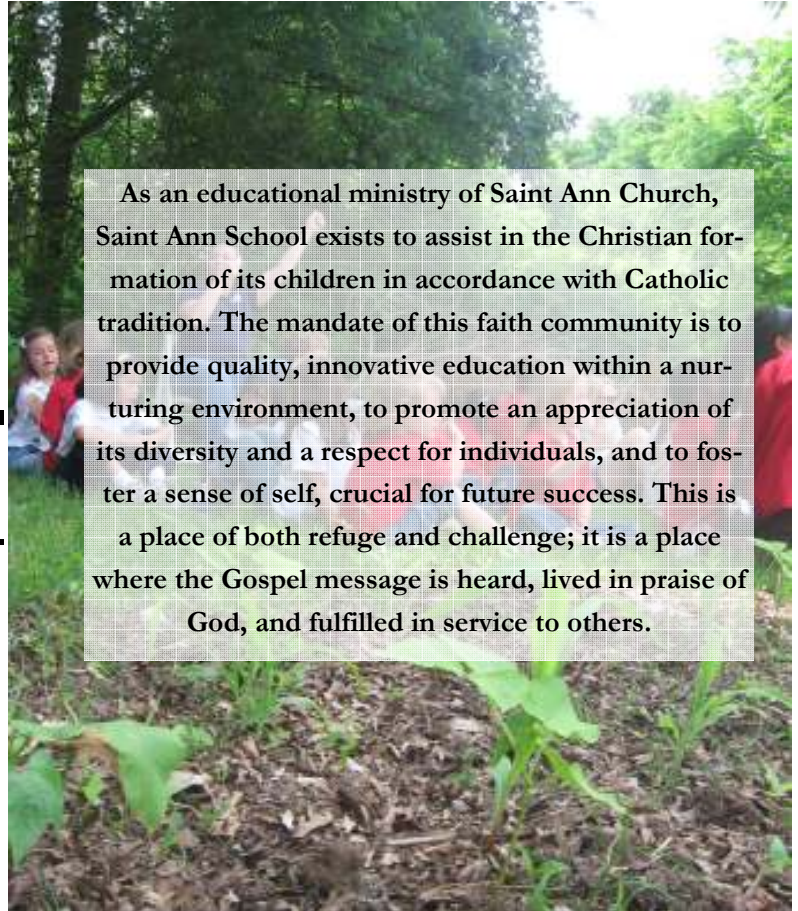


*Students shelling dried beans and sharing stories about the garden.*

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As an educational ministry of Saint Ann Church, Saint Ann School exists to assist in the Christian formation of its children in accordance with Catholic tradition. The mandate of this faith community is to provide quality, innovative education within a nurturing environment, to promote an appreciation of its diversity and a respect for individuals, and to foster a sense of self, crucial for future success. This is a place of both refuge and challenge; it is a place where the Gospel message is heard, lived in praise of God, and fulfilled in service to others.



## *Gardening as Prayer*

There is something profound at work in gardening, perhaps, because plant life is created by God and, when we work with plants, we sense a closeness to God.

Gardens, even the smallest one, can become windows to our inner life. Weeding and cultivating, planting and harvesting, celebrating successes and bemoaning failures can teach us more about ourselves than we might imagine.

Garden images abound in the scriptures. In the prayer of gardening we come to know that deep within the soul is an inner garden of great importance, one created and planted and tended by our loving God. There we discover what it means to be more truly human and to relate to one another and all creation in love.

Caring for a garden requires that we move beyond our own needs for

a moment and think about the needs of another; the needs of each small plant and the needs of the garden as a whole. We aren't in charge; we can only listen and observe.

The sun, soil and wind benefit not only the plants, but the students in the garden. How can we be inundated within this warm embrace and not also feel the hand of God?