

Don't Like Radishes? Try Gardening...

By Nelsy Dominguez · Photo by Zoe Isabella



Guiding her friend, my six year old explains, “Plants need soil, water, sun, and loving care. Then you can eat the radishes you grow.” She points to a row of low-growing green leaves and gently parts them to show neatly packed bright red and white tubular bulbs peeking out of the ground. “Wow, those are pretty. Can I try them too?” her friend, also six, asks. There’s much to treasure about this simple exchange. A year ago my child would tell you she did not like radishes, would not, in fact, even try them. Today she’s an avid proponent of radishes, greens, tomatoes, and other produce grown in our small plot as part of the Garden Program at Girls Inc. of Santa Fe, where she’s a participant.

Girls Inc.’s garden is one of twenty-two projects awarded up to one thousand dollars through the Farm to School Educational Activities program at Farm to

Table this year. Kris Falvo, executive director of Girls Inc. of Santa Fe explains that girls are learning about sustainable gardening, while at the same time performing hands-on experiments to enhance their exposure in science and math. “Through these interactive activities, our girls are having fun and learning at the same time. The best part is eating the produce from their efforts.”

Curiosity and enthusiasm come naturally to kids, and this understanding and love of gardens and the patience, delight, and inspiration derived from them are core components of Farm to School programs. Whether carried out at a school during the school year, after-school activities, or summer programs, gardens reconnect kids, of any age, with the natural world while teaching them valuable sustainability concepts that link their everyday lives to food and self-determination.

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As demonstrated by my own child, gardens tangibly showcase the source of many foods and entice kids to try new ones, as well as to seek and make healthier food choices.

Many educational goals can be addressed through gardens, including personal and social responsibility. The main areas of focus of the garden program are food justice, drought awareness, ecology, cultivation of practical skills, and biophilia (a positive association with nature). Making connections in an outdoor space is what it is all about. "I have truly been amazed by their intuition when it comes to ecology and critiquing our global food system. These girls are strong, smart, and bold, and their voices should matter," explains Zoë Isabella, AmeriCorps member, and garden facilitator at Girls Inc. of Santa Fe.

The Farm to School Educational Activities Program consists of a wide range of community-based projects that teach children the basics of gardening, build agricultural awareness, explore the idea of farming as a career, develop openness to experiencing new and fresher foods, encourage personal healthy choices, and develop an appreciation of the environment. Now in its third year, the program has awarded a total of \$44,543 in support of fifty-one projects across New Mexico. Activities supported through the program include school gardens, creating garden environments beneficial to insects and plants, farmers visiting schools, field trips to farms, tasting events, and culinary, nutrition, and health education events with a local food focus. At any age, it is not too late to partake in the wonders of gardening. The garden is a place where inspiration abounds, where every seed, planted and cared for, is a powerhouse of potential.

Find more information about Farm to Table's programs at www.farmtotablenm.org

To build on the Farm to School Education Activities Program efforts, Farm to Table has been working with schools to incorporate locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables into school meals and snack programs—as yet another way to connect healthy food options to what is on the plate. The opportunity to curb childhood obesity and other illnesses through an improved diet for children, rich in New Mexico-grown fresh fruits and vegetables, is possible. In 2012, through the efforts of Farm to Table and partners, the number of New Mexico school districts that purchased New Mexico-grown produce quadrupled, with nearly sixty out of eighty-nine school districts, purchasing local produce. New Mexico Grown Fresh Fruits and Vegetables for School Meals is central to Farm to Table's Healthy Kids—Healthy Economy campaign, which looks to enhance the diets of school children, promoting healthier lifestyles and increasing academic achievement. Learn more at www.farmtotablenm.org



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FARM TO RESTAURANT PROGRAM

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