

## Five schools' gardens are continuing to flourish in the NEK!

NEWPORT — Eating locally-grown food is taking on a whole new meaning at the Troy, Holland, Lowell, Coventry, and Jay/Westfield Schools this year.

If you have a child that attends one of these five lucky schools, then you have surely taken notice! After all, it is hard to miss the yellow faces of the mammoth sunflowers or the bright orange pumpkins in the front of each of the schools.

Beautiful, diversified gardens continue to thrive at these five schools and with each garden producing on average 300 to 400 pounds of produce they are making a big impact in the school cafeteria.

The gardens are a joint effort between Green Mountain Farm-to-School and the 21st Century Learning Center with support from Vermont Department of Education Promising Practices Grant to offer a year-round after-school program for students focusing on nutrition and agriculture education.

The after-school program, appropriately named "Planting Seeds of Change," uses hands-on activities to promote healthy lifestyle choices and the gardens are the center piece of this program. The program begins each fall with the start of the school year. Throughout the fall session the students harvest the vegetables, cook with them, and even preserve some of them for use later.

What vegetables do not get used by the students in the after school program get sent to the school's kitchen to be used in the school lunches! The program has found that students are much more likely to try new foods when they have participated in growing the foods. They are now enjoying confetti salads, beatnik brownies, and roasted root vegetables. Neither the garden nor the program stops here!

Students go on to learn how to prepare a garden for winter; they add compost, till, mulch and plant garlic. The program continues into the winter when students focus on cooking and nutrition activities such as apples to applesauce, eating whole grains, and making healthy snacks.

By March students are ready to jump right in to planning the garden for the next season and starting seedlings indoors. After a new garden is planted by students in the spring, the garden continues to prosper through the summer with the support of community members and volunteers.

They all gather with the program leader to tend to the gardens twice a month. This last summer at Troy, Lowell, and Coventry schools students and volunteers even had the chance to work with Brian Gluck of Rustic Cedar to build moveable trellises for their schools' gardens; an event that which was funded by a Vermont Community Gardening Network grant.

Although the gardens are maintained primarily by the Planting Seeds of Change program students, they are becoming resources for the whole school as teachers and students use the gardens as outdoor classrooms.

For example, entire classes at the Coventry and Holland schools have participated in seed saving activities and preserving food workshops lead by Green Mountain Farm-to-School. The program is looking forward to expanding the use of the garden to more classes this spring!

Each Garden bears its own individual name, thought up and chosen by the students who participate in the PSC Program. However, that tidbit of juicy information you will have to find out for your self! Respectful visitors are always welcome!

For more information about the Gardening Program visit: [GreenMountainFarmtoSchool.org](http://GreenMountainFarmtoSchool.org)



*A happy harvest from the Jay/Westfield Garden.*