Our Spring Taste Test: Sugar Snap Peas

Early March will find students throughout the City Schools of Decatur preparing beds in their respective school gardens and planting sugar snap peas for the Spring Taste Test. Peas are a crowd pleaser, to be sure, but they are more than just a tasty veggie treat. Peas are full of Vitamins K, B6, and C, in addition to being a great source of iron, folate and beta-carotene. Add to that the low calorie/high fiber content and you’ve got yourself a winning snack. Dip them in hummus raw, steam them in a simmer, side dish or toss them in a stir fry for a hearty salad. We plan to taste them district-wide in late May, so look for peas to appear around the same time at your local farmers’ markets and grocery stores.

Quinoa Salad with Sugar Snap Peas

Serves 6  (Adapted from Food & Wine)

Ingredients

- 1/2 cup salted roasted pumpkin seeds
- 3 tablespoons white wine vinegar
- 1/4 cup plus 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- Salt and freshly ground pepper
- 1/2 pound sugar snap peas
- 2. In a small saucepan, combine the quinoa with 2 cups of water and bring to a boil. Cover and cook over low heat until all of the water has evaporated and the quinoa is tender, about 15 minutes. Uncover and fluff the quinoa, then transfer to a large bowl and let cool to room temperature.

1. In a small saucepan of boiling salted water, simmer the peas until bright green and crisp-tender, about 1 minute. Drain and spread out on a plate to cool, then pat dry. Cut into 1-inch pieces.

2. In a small saucenop, combine the quinoa with 2 cups of water and bring to a boil. Cover and cook over low heat until all of the water has evaporated and the quinoa is tender, about 1 minute. Drain and spread out on a large plate to cool, then pat dry. Cut the peas on the diagonal into 1-inch pieces.

3. In a bowl, combine the oil and vinegar with salt and pepper. Add the peas to the quinoa with the pumpkin seeds, chives and dressing; stir. Season with salt and pepper and serve at room temperature of lightly chilled.
The Decatur Farm to School Fall Dine Out had a great turnout! Thanks to all of our supporters, we raised approximately $4,500 specifically for Decatur Farm to School, like teacher trainings, taste tests and other garden classroom initiatives.

We would like to thank our participating restaurant partners: Cakes & Ale, The Iberian Pig, Farm Burger, Raging Burrito, Seven Hens, Saporit di Napol, Wahooli Grill, Lawrence’s Cafe, Twain’s Brewpub & Billiards, Leon’s Full Service, Brick Store Pub, The Universal Joint, Dalkhurst Market, and Steinbeck’s Bar & Grill. We would be very grateful if we didn’t thank our tireless volunteers and every business who donated raffle items. Thank you for your support and look for details for the Spring Dine Out in our next newsletter!

City Schools of Decatur Honored for their Farm to School Program

City Schools of Decatur (CSD) were honored for a second time at the Georgia Organics convention this year! CSD was one of 30 school districts to be awarded the grant, and plans are now in place to create four new garden plots.

The Golden Radish Award is a prestigious state-wide farm to school distinction which acknowledges the outstanding leadership of school representatives building comprehensive farm to school programs. CSD was one of 30 school districts honored at the state capital by State School Superintendent Dr. John Barge. Commissioner of Agriculture Gary Black, General, Agriculture Commissioner Dr. Brenda Fitzgerald, Director of School Nutrition Nancy rice, State Program Manager Agricultural Education Chip Bridges and Georgia Organics Board Chair Mandee Mahoney.

The 2014 Golden Radish Award recognizes school districts for all aspects of farm to school— from local food procurement to hosting taste tests to gardening with students. The Golden Radish Award is comprised of four levels of achievement: Gold, Silver, Bronze, and Honorary, to recognize districts at every level of engagement for their farm to school programs.

Only two other participating schools in the state attained the Gold Level. We are proud to have been in the kitchen with us, watching us prepare dishes using ingredients from the garden. It’s been fun for all of us.

Do you see the fresh food student garden continuing into the future for use in your culinary program?

I do. I think everyone -- from my level all the way to the top level -- wants to keep it going because it’s going to be incorporated into this program as much as it can [with the upcoming school expansions].

As soon as garden space is available, we’re going to start collaborating with the student body that’s in charge of the student garden and build a beautiful relationship between the two. I believe it’s important for our students to experience how local gardens and farms are an integral part of the economy. And that’s why it’s important to have this connection between our culinary program and the garden.

City Schools of Decatur Students Experience Farm to School in Different Ways

An Interview with Chef Rian Macdonald, Culinary Instructor at Decatur High School’s Decatur Career Academy

How many culinary classes do you teach?

I have six classes per day, four of them are Introduction to culinary, and two upper culinary classes: Culinary 1 and Culinary 2. We are hoping to build a Culinary 3 class which will be the capstone internship project, in which the culinary students will actually be working at a facility within the culinary industry and getting school credit for training in that has to do with food — proper food handling, food safety, sanitation and nutrition as well as team work, sportsmanship and leadership.

Do your students compete in culinary competitions?

Yes, my students audition to become a member of a selected culinary team that competes with other culinary high school programs throughout the state. There are several culinary competitions we enter -- there is an Iron Chef event produced by Delia’s Group that we are trying to enter. There are also culinary competitions at the college level like the Art Institute and the Gordon Bleu of Atlanta. We have had two students who competed in the FCSA state event on the Georgia State Fair; Jada Brown competed against 20 other Georgia high school students and won 2nd place in the state, and River Young won fourth place in the state. So we’re doing pretty well so far this year. We are gearing up for regional competitions in January.

Tell us about your relationship with the Community Garden Group and what has become of that.

Moira Bucciarelli and Tamara Jones approached me and asked if my students would be interested in helping out with harvest and producing food from the garden. I am a huge slow food movement chef — I believe in Farm to Table — I believe it’s beneficial to both the consumer and the farmer. Everyone benefits. For my training purposes, it was a perfect opportunity to incorporate the garden to table activities into my curriculum. It’s been a beautiful relationship. We started with culinary students helping harvest in the fall. This year we are trying to enter the state competitions. We’ve been a beautiful relationship. Tamara has been in the kitchen with us, watching us prepare dishes using ingredients from the garden. It’s been fun for all of us.

With the help of parent volunteer Joey Zeigler, and Melanie Heckman from the Wydle Center, Ms. Howard will have their spring garden. The garden committee has plans to construct four raised beds, one for each grade level. The new raised beds will be located in a small fenced area near the playground. Construction is slated for January-February 2015 to ensure they are ready for spring planting. Since the grant funding for the raised beds is still pending, the Wydle Center will continue to work with Westchester to prepare the trees that they will plant in their new garden plots.

The Westchester Garden Committee is looking for more parent volunteers as they will need help in construction and planting. If you are interested in helping establish a garden to support the Bridge Alternative Program, please contact Ms. Howard at ceohoward@csdecatur.net to learn how to get involved.

Farm to School at Clairemont Elementary

Clairemont Elementary’s first grade Fall Expedition has helped to instill in students the wonder and fun of plants. The Georgia Performance Standards and the natural curiosity and excitement of children drove the learning. Integral to this process was the knowledge, inspiration, and support of numerous boards by other teachers and the Wydle Center expert, Nichole Lupo. Through this project the students had opportunities to grow and harvest plants, read and write about plants and seasons, and share their new expertise about the interdependence of people and plants, agriculture, and the ecosystem.

The students began by harvesting a sweet potato crop that they had planted as kindergartners the previous spring. They did a mini investigation of the sweet potato. Following harvest, they rooted potatoes in classroom jars and documented changes in their science journals. They learned about the parts of a sweet potato plant, what it needs to grow, and what benefits the sweet potato has for people.

Meanwhile, each of the four classes planted various cool weather vegetables. They planted beets, broccoli, fennel, and sugar snap peas. They read about and documented activities and observations of these vegetables in their science journals. Then they created informational text about each of the vegetables and donated the books to the school library. Finally they celebrated with families, sharing their work and knowledge. The celebration included a tasting of their very own, school-grown, sweet potatoes. The students are now eagerly waiting for the harvesting and tasting of their fall crops.

Westchester Elementary is Growing a Garden

It all started as a seed of an idea that grew in Celeste Howard’s second grade class. Ms. Howard’s students brought her seeds, pits and plants, in hopes of planting them right outside the classroom door. Ms. Howard recounts, “It was a daily discussion, and they were all serious about getting a garden back there. Since this is my first year in City of Decatur schools, I asked Principal Lisa King if there was any possibility of getting a garden on campus. She suggested that I apply for a DEF grant to establish a garden for the whole school.” Ms. Howard took the idea back to her class, who helped her create an action plan and published a final draft. They were successful in having the idea realized and are now in place to create four raised beds, one for each grade level.

With the help of parent volunteer Joey Zeigler, and Melanie Heckman from the Wydle Center, Ms. Howard will have their spring garden. The garden committee has plans to construct four raised beds, one for each grade level. The new raised beds will be located in a small fenced area near the playground. Construction is slated for January-February 2015 to ensure they are ready for spring planting. Since the grant funding for the raised beds is still pending, the Wydle Center will continue to work with Westchester to prepare the trees that they will plant in their new garden plots.