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Digging deep and putting down roots

Anna Del Savio April 09 2021



Partnership between Lewis & Clark Elementary, OSU Extension Service will provide education, nutrition

Over spring break, a group of gardening enthusiasts came together to build a school garden at Lewis & Clark Elementary School in

St. Helens.

Oregon State University Extension Service staff and Master Gardeners spent a combined 140 hours working on the garden over spring break, but the work started long before that.

The Oregon Department of Education announced grant recipients totalling more than \$2.5 million for Farm to School and School Garden projects. One recipient was the OSU Extension Service for the project at Lewis & Clark.

The garden will feature "first foods," meaning the foods grown and consumed by Indigenous communities in the area.

The extension office and Lewis & Clark have collaborated for nearly a decade.

"We had just decided to take it a little bit further and create a native plant and school garden," explained Julie Scism, OSU Extension nutrition education program assistant.

Jenny Rudolph of the extension service's family and community health program led the project from the grant application stage.

Rudolph said that when staff surveyed teachers about the garden, teachers wanted "a space for social and emotional support for the children when they return to school."



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"We hope that this garden does a small part to engage the kids and teachers and to bring some joy as they transition back to the classroom," Rudolph said in an announcement about the garden creation.

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COURTESY PHOTO: JENNY RUDOLPH - OSU Extension nutrition education program assistant Julie Scism works in the Lewis & Clark Elementary School garden over spring break 2021.

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"What we initially wanted from this grant project was to start an Oregon's first food garden," Scism explained. "We also had a lot of input from teachers that they would love to have a place to plant and grow vegetables," she added.

OSU Extension staff enlisted the help of Sean Jacobson to design the future garden. The plan designed by Jacobson includes native edible plants like huckleberry, serviceberry, currants, coastal strawberry and more.

"The focus of that is to give kids a first foods experience," Jacobson said, "so they have some understanding of what it was like for the Indigenous people that inhabited that land and are still here."

The team also installed raised beds. The beds amount to 200 square feet of space for planting fruits and vegetables that will be used in school meals. Nutrition services staff quickly came up with wishlists for produce they could use in the cafeteria to cook student meals.

Jacobson said one design challenge was the potential for deer to eat whatever the school planted. To keep the food safe from the deer, staff built net structures over the beds. In colder months, the structures can be covered with material to make a greenhouse.

There is still more work to be done on the garden. This spring, staff will install a three-bin composting system "to recycle green waste from the school kitchen and teach kids about the importance of reducing food waste," according to an OSU Extension Service press release.



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COURTESY PHOTO: JENNY RUDOLPH - OSU Extension student intern and garden designer Sean Jacobson spreads mulch in the native plant beds at Lewis & Clark Elementary School.

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The team will also install a sensory garden, which includes plants that engage the senses, with a variety of textures and scents.

"When you actually can put a student in a beautiful, tactile food forest ... that's what'll get you as a child, that's what will suck you in and get you invested in nature and growing food down the line," Jacobson said.

A few local Master Gardeners lent their skills to the project. Dennis and Linda Snyder donated more than 3,500 pounds of produce to the Columbia Pacific Food Bank last year, and they turned their efforts to the school garden over spring break.

"They're huge supports of the food bank and anything food- and garden-related," Scism said.

Pat LaPointe, another Master Gardener and "an invaluable resource," according to Scism, brought his irrigation expertise to help with the watering system for the raised beds.

Jacobson also works with the Sauvie Island Center, which teaches kids about farming through field trips and summer camps at Topaz Farm. Jacobson said he hopes that the Lewis & Clark garden will help pave the way for more students to head out to Sauvie Island to learn more about farming and food production.



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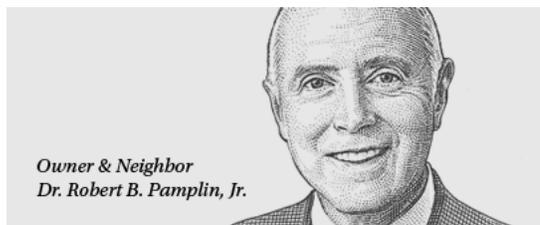
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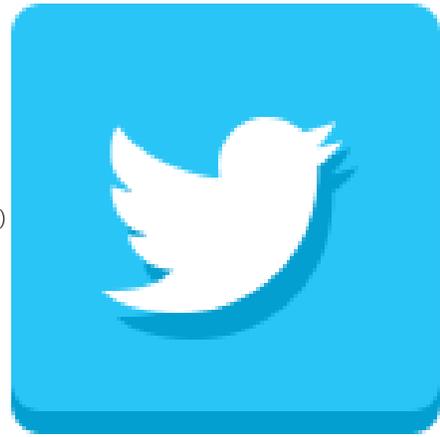
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