

Program Description and Outcomes

The 8th grade students were shown Ron Finley's Guerilla Gardening TED talk and challenged to see if growing food would change their attitudes towards eating. They were also challenged to think bigger and see if having everyday people grow food might be part of the solution to the problems of obesity, over consumption of junk food, and the high cost and difficulty of access to fresh and healthy produce. Did as Ron Finley professed, "Kids that grow kale, eat kale?"

We used Eliot Coleman's book, *Four Season Harvest*, (and Skyped with his daughter, Clara) to test the premise that you could even grow food in our climate in the fall. If students could grow food in our harsh fall climate and then eat it, students would hopefully come to the conclusion that gardening was a viable solution to poor nutrition and food deserts.



Students, in groups of three to six, built several different types of grow systems from scratch. One group build a fifteen by ten foot high tunnel over two raised beds. Another group, installed a homemade solar thermal system to hydronically heat beds in our small greenhouse. Two other groups of students built cold frames. In addition, we had students using some more modern, indoor farming techniques incorporating LED grow lights and vertical window gardening. Students planted seeds in early September and were transplanting the seedlings into their grow systems by the middle of October. Each outdoor system had a remote web-based temperature sensor so students could monitor how the system created a micro climate. To everyone's surprise, the lettuce, radishes, kale, arugula, beets, and other greens survived and thrived.



Even when the temperature plummeted to the single digits, the greens bounced right back as the temperature warmed up to the 50's in their protected homes. The cold frames were the most successful outdoor growing tool and also the easiest to build and maintain. They produced spectacular looking heads of lettuce and well-formed radishes in surprisingly little time. They also were located in the sunniest location. Indoors, the LED grow system yielded good results as well. By November, we had our harvest party, complete with homemade dressing, to share our bounty. Seeing boys proudly hold up their radishes, like a Dad with his new son, showed the power of gardening. Students tenderly washed and prepared the salad, with a respect you wouldn't expect to see from middle school age students. They ran all over the school offering teachers and administrators samples of their greens. They were good! While we can't say every student ate kale, many students did broaden their culinary horizons and truly enjoyed their harvests. Finally, students hosted an evening event in which they toured people around their gardens, offered a cold-frame building workshop, served food from the garden, and shared everything they learned about healthy eating so families could learn from their experiences and success.



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