

## Growing Plants and Minds: Big and Small

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What do New Trier students, Oak Terrace Elementary students, and beans all have in common? Of course we know they all grow incredibly fast, but in this case, the three of them came together for a dynamic seed starting lesson under the guidance of Nurture.

The main goals were to help each student plant lettuce, corn, and beans and to teach why it's important to eat our vegetables. A group of 24 New Trier sophomore girls taught this lesson for 16 classes at Oak Terrace Elementary in Highwood.



The morning started with prep work which included filling the planting containers with potting soil and water, then labeling them as Corn, Beans or Lettuce. The importance of this exercise was appreciated once the big students met their smaller students – effective planning makes for more successful execution, because the kids were raring to get their hands dirty! A Nurture volunteer mentored each group of New Trier students in teaching effectively and helped them to stay on schedule.

The girls used their knowledge to teach their bunch of curious students in a fun and interactive way. Vitamin K from lettuce helps our bodies stop bleeding if we get cut. Fiber from beans keeps food moving through our bodies and makes our tummies feel full. Corn helps regulate our blood sugar by slowing down how quickly the sugar goes into the blood stream.

They also told the interesting story of the Native American Three Sisters Gardens. Native Americans would plant corn, beans, and squash together. The corn provides a stake for the beans to grow up. The beans increase the nitrogen in the soil which helps the corn grow. The squash would be planted at the base. Its leaves shaded the soil so weeds couldn't grow as easily, and its prickly leaves kept animals from eating the food before the people could pick it. So the "Three Sisters" would help each other grow, like a family.

And that is certainly what it felt like the morning of the program, like big sisters teaching little ones, helping them to grow their new plants as well as their minds. It goes without saying that the New Trier students, whose job it was to teach, came away with more learning than they may have expected.

How to teach Kindergarteners whose first language is Spanish and who are still shaky with English? The girls used their hands and facial gestures and were even excited about speaking some Spanish. How to teach children with special needs? A lot of one on one time, patience and understanding made this class a success. How to teach the older kids and keep them as engaged as the younger ones? A lot of creativity and enthusiasm.

By the end of the classes the girls had gained much confidence in themselves and their abilities to successfully connect with a different crowd. They also realized that even as young as they were, they had the ability to transmit important life lessons about eating a healthy diet and enjoying it!

Nurture is a grassroots, volunteer, non-profit organization. Nurture's mission is to empower family members of all ages (children, teens and adults) with the tools and resources needed to prepare healthy, delicious meals even when faced with limited time and budget. Nurture was founded in 2008 to address hunger, childhood obesity, wellness, and an increasingly unhealthy food chain. It focuses on low-income families with children at high risk for nutritional and health problems. Learn more about Nurture at [www.nurtureyourfamily.org](http://www.nurtureyourfamily.org).