

SPOTLIGHT on Sustainability



Students at Discovery Middle School bring STEM and gardening together!

I'm so excited that our school garden is inspiring students to start gardens at home."

— Mr. Jorge Vallin, OCPS Discovery Middle School, STEM instructor.

How did this idea 'spring' up? Over the years, Mr. Vallin's science classes have always included planting seeds and studying the growing process. "I enjoyed watching the students get excited as the seeds began to sprout and grow," he said. Then one year, before Mother's Day, his classes offered the plants to students, for donations. The funds would help expand their STEM classroom activities. From there, the dream of more plants grew and eventually a greenhouse as well. This is a great connection to one of our Sustainable Orange County Plan strategies; "Learners Value their Environment" by including living laboratories and gardens as part of their science curriculum.

What tools did students use? Using STEM curriculum in design and modeling along with computer-based tools, the students designed a greenhouse, which they were hoping to build. As the plan was coming together, Mr. Vallin was contacted by a former student working on the Hometown Heroes grant program through Lowe's. With his assistance, the class would receive funding, supplies, and resources to build the greenhouse and stock it, especially with plants. Although logistics changed the plan slightly, the garden is growing, producing, and supplying great lessons for the students every day.

What's growing? There are vegetables and herbs, like tomatoes, lettuce, and basil, which the students take home to share with their families. There are papaya and orchid trees around the edges of the garden, as well as flowers to provide a splash of color. But more importantly, there are lessons about water, sunlight, soil, and nutrients needed for plants to grow; lessons about the time, energy, and care it takes to grow even a small amount of food. This is first-hand knowledge of sustainability; planting, growing, harvesting, eating, and learning how to do it better, more creatively, using whatever is available to you. Students are learning about how we live and eat now and the possibilities for the future.

What's next? There are still plenty of supplies for a great start to this year's STEM garden. Plus, there are more STEM lessons to be learned related to sustainability, such as "Energy in the Environment". The possibilities to educate our students about sustainability exist in even the simplest of lessons, like growing plants, yet they are so important. Learning to live better today, so future generations can live better tomorrow, that's the lesson of sustainability we want our children to learn.

Want to learn more? So many Orange County public schools have created school gardens. You can read more about them and other Green Schools initiatives at [OCPS Sustainability](http://www.ocpsustainability.com).



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