

FRESH from the Garden

Teacher Feature



Royal Oaks Elementary in Kannapolis recently reopened after the entire school was demolished and rebuilt. The students spent more than a year spread across other schools in the Cabarrus County School System. A new year has brought a fresh start to the Royal Oaks community

and on Wednesday, September 9, the entire school population, more than 300 students and teachers, joined volunteers from NC State's Plants for Human Health Institute (PHHI) and Lowe's Heroes from the home improvement store on Highway 29, Concord, for a school garden blitz build.

Starting at 9:00 am, each grade level descended on the garden site for 30 minutes to be a part of the build - assembling raised beds, filling beds with soil, planting a pollinator garden, and more. The garden team selected a rainbow-inspired garden design. You may have heard that it's important to "eat the rainbow," meaning the more colorful the foods are on your plate, the more nutritional benefit your body gets. This is a lesson that cannot be repeated often enough to develop healthy habits in children.

As a newly established arts magnet school, Royal Oaks' garden will be an art hub. With the help of Arts Coordinator Amy-Lyn Foster, teachers will integrate arts in the garden with the use of the book [Dig Art!](#). This book discusses making mosaics, leaf and flower printmaking, natural dyes, photography and painting in the garden.

The teachers at Royal Oaks will receive professional development from Amy Bowman and Doug Vernon (STEM support from PHHI) in the coming weeks to guide their use of the garden as an outdoor classroom that offers applied opportunities to teach grade level standards. Kayla Kerzoneff, a fifth grade teacher at Royal Oaks, immediately identified the potential for a math lesson on coordinate planes as they gridded the bed into square feet on installation day. The garden grid offers a real-life X-axis and Y-axis. The raised bed will also be a tool for learning about area models and how to calculate volume.



Kayla also leads the after-school Reading Club and has plans for garden integration. She says, "We will be reading [James and the Giant Peach](#). In this book, James takes care of a garden at his two aunts' house. He then goes on a magical adventure in a giant peach. I think this book shows the joy and creativity that can come from gardening. I also would love to have students just sitting in the garden to enjoy the scenery while reading their text."

Schools without a garden can still engage students with plant care responsibilities. "Classroom Botanist" is one of the classroom jobs in Kayla's classroom. This student helps care for the plants in the classroom, rain or shine.





Plant

There is still time to plant cool-season vegetables. You can sow seeds of crops such as radishes and lettuce but most other fall crops (broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, kohlrabi, Brussels sprouts, kale) will need to be planted as transplants to be able to harvest before cold weather arrives.

Strawberries will be planted in the next couple of weeks. Be sure to get your plants in the ground quickly after receiving them and keep them well-watered until they are rooted in.

Harvest

We've seen some beautiful – and some GIANT – sweet potatoes harvested already. In fact, some came out of the ground on the first day of school. They are ready now, but be sure to harvest before the first frost. You should be able to store them until Thanksgiving (or longer) at room temperature with no loss.

If you've sown radishes this fall, keep an eye out for them about 30 days after planting, when they should be ready to be pulled. If you wait too long, the radishes may split.

Maintenance

Remember to fertilize your beds with an organic fertilizer before planting. Read the label to apply at the correct rate – it could be an applied math lesson.

Expect to see a lot of insect activity on your leafy vegetables such as kale, kohlrabi, broccoli and cauliflower. Caterpillars will leave noticeable holes in leaves, often "hiding" right on the leaf veins, sometimes on the underside of the leaves. Pluck them off and discard. You may see white moths flying around. Consider pointing out the insect life cycle as these moths are laying eggs that become munching caterpillars.



Grant Opportunities

Educators are accustomed to finding funds to support their teaching efforts. We've posted a [list](#) of more than 20 grant opportunities that might support some facet of your school garden effort.

These support a wide variety of activities, from specific, small projects like a shade structure to installing an entire garden. Some are awarded on a rolling basis to viable projects as long as funds are available, others are extremely competitive. [Take a look](#) and let us know if we can help you!



Growing Healthy Bodies

Honey-Roasted Sweet Potatoes

Sweet potatoes are a nutritional powerhouse, offering fiber, Vitamin A, and anti-inflammatory compounds. Look for orange, purple, and yellow varieties.

Forget the marshmallow topping and thick syrup that often drags down this superfood. These sweet potato bites are a tasty snack or side dish.

Chop. Toss. Heat. Eat.

[Get the Recipe](#)



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