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## School Garden Cultivates Learning from the Ground Up

*Springhill Elementary School to host plant sale*

*By Cathy Tyson*



Some of the Green Team volunteer moms pictured at the Springhill Garden, from left: Julie Roberts, Mandy Hughes, Nanette Heffernan, Kathy Hemmenway, Meg McAdam and Kendra Loveless  
Photo Cathy Tyson

well-drained site is an ideal outdoor classroom.

The garden boasts a cornucopia of plants from young kiwi trees growing up a homemade rebar teepee, sweet peas, tulips, herbs and a unique edible retaining wall composed of espaliered apple trees featuring red delicious, fuji and gala apples on different branches of the same tree, along with a number of raised beds waiting for seedlings. An amazing feat considering the garden is only a few years old - originally part of the school property, but only recently through a herculean parent effort transformed into its current state.

It took a village to get the garden off the ground, and continues to take an army of volunteers to keep it running. Friend of a friend Kelly Bradley helped with the installation of the Burton Valley school garden, and was brought in to assist the staff and parent volunteers with the garden set up, projects and maintenance. Credit parent volunteers who donate time on upkeep and organization, along with supportive school administration and teachers who have embraced the many learning opportunities the garden presents for helping this garden grow.

Green Team volunteers complimented Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and a number of Eagle Scout projects for additions like the very sturdy composting bins, butterfly garden and hand washing station. The garden keeps on giving even after the regular school year; over the summer, families can adopt one of the raised beds to water and manage.

Springhill Principal Heather Duncan credits the Parent Faculty Club, and adult Green Team volunteers who are dedicated to getting the garden off the ground. "They've been incredibly supportive." That, coupled with hiring a professional outdoor classroom aide to coordinate with teachers and volunteers to bring rigor and excitement, delivers an important lesson of sustainability to the community, said Duncan. The garden has been so successful, that it was chosen by the Contra Costa County Master Gardeners as one of a handful of teaching gardens for other schools that would like to start a similar project.

To raise awareness and money for the garden, Springhill Elementary School's Green Team will hold a plant sale from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sunday, April 14 on the lower playground of campus at 3301 Springhill Road, Lafayette. Spring starter plants will be on sale to raise money to benefit the garden. Tomatoes, eggplant, squash, melons, herbs, peppers and more - some planted as seeds by Springhill students - will be supplemented with plants and gardening supplies from Mt. Diablo Nursery.

Parent volunteer Kendra Loveless put together a website for online ordering, which will accept orders through April 1 at [greenteamplantsale.gostorego.com](http://greenteamplantsale.gostorego.com). Plants that are pre-purchased can be picked up at the plant sale. There are a limited number of "Springhill grown" plants, so early orders are encouraged. In addition to plants for sale, there will be gardening activities and tips from master gardeners and refreshments provided by Pancoast Pizza. All proceeds will support the school garden learning center and Springhill's Green Team program.

At times there seems to be a disconnect with the parents that this is just a fun add-on, "but there are lessons on chemistry, math, history that you just can't get in a classroom," said Nanette Heffernan, master gardener and passionate volunteer at the Springhill Elementary School garden. She points out the multiple raised beds, where the kids calculate yield, and get a lesson in fractions by dividing up the space, kicking it up a notch for the older students - they can do the same thing with the colonial circular planting area.

The colonial garden is designed to dovetail with the students' curriculum unit on early settlers, using heirloom seedlings that were part of the Native American diet. Got food scraps? After lunch every school day, Green Team kids take recyclable food waste like banana peels and sandwich crusts up to the composting pile, which ultimately will go back to feed the plants.

Because the spacious garden backs up to Briones open space, volunteer Kathy Hemmenway comments, "We have a definite gopher problem," along with birds and squirrels that love to nibble. Their solution: wire mesh framing the base of the raised beds - and strawberry plants in recycle cinder block. With clustered picnic tables and a curved presentation area, along with a shed for tools and equipment, and of course lots of planting areas, the sunny,

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