

## Get Growing

*Starting an afterschool garden club has so many rewards when you connect teenagers to teach younger kids!*



**FIGURE 1** Making garden hats using the Junior Master Gardener curriculum

*Plant fast-growing vegetables like radish for a quick and fun harvest!*

# 4-H AFTERSCHOOL GARDEN CLUB

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My twin sister, Reilly, and I were in the sixth grade when we decided to join 4-H. We joined a club that focused on teaching younger kids. With little knowledge about the club or its reach, we dove into teaching different subjects, but it wasn't until we had been teaching for awhile that we realized our specific interest was with the environment and teaching healthy living. We had taught about vermicomposting and healthy living at our 4-H retreat and began to see the overlap of gardening and healthy living. We became very interested in this idea: gardening as a form of healthy living.

## HOW WE DID IT

As we were entering our sophomore year in high school, we decided to ask our 4-H agent about starting a gardening program at our local elementary school. Luckily, this school had an afterschool program called CIS (Communities in Schools), which provided a daycare service for students. We had previously taught in CIS programs throughout our county, but we had never been apart of a longer term program. We knew that to begin a garden we would need to establish a longer term program, so we set the program timeframe for 9 weeks, beginning in April. We decided to

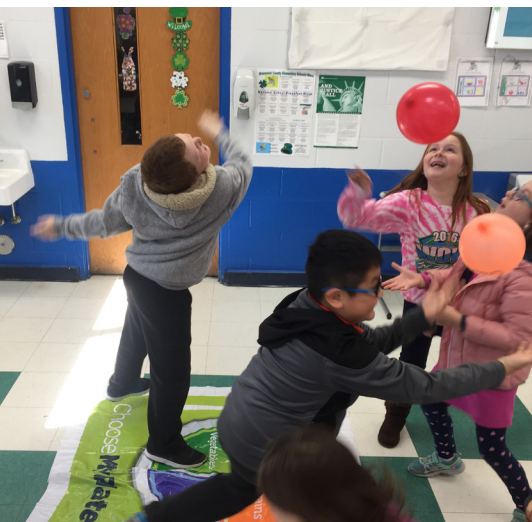
utilize a Junior Master Gardener curriculum we had previously used, *Learn Grow Eat Go*, a curriculum which combines the principles of healthy living and farm to table, *Figure 1*. We were also amateur gardeners, so our agent connected us with the Extension Master Gardeners of our county, and with our county's FoodCorps service member to help with gardening knowledge.

## THE GARDEN

We decided to plant spring vegetables, such as radishes (great because of their quick growing time), kale, snap peas, squash, and then later in the season we also planted cucumbers, and a watermelon. Our program would begin with a snack time (something already established by CIS), in which we talked with the students and began to form close relationships with the kids. We would then transition to a short lesson on healthy living or some basic principles of gardening. We taught

children of all ages in elementary school, something you should definitely consider when starting a gardening club, so we had to keep our information delivery short and spend more time on hands-on activities, *Figure 2* and *Figure 3*. The hands-on activities reinforced what we just learned, and after the garden was established we would end by going out to the garden and talking about our progress. This set-up worked best for our students, and helped keep the older kids interested and the





**FIGURE 2** Active garden games kept the kids happy and engaged



**FIGURE 3** Having a variety of activities creates interest in gardening



**FIGURE 4** Gardening in containers worked well for the afterschool club

younger kids satisfied. We began our garden on the 4th week, the weeks leading up to this we used our lessons to prepare them for the garden care, and to teach them the basics of gardening. Then on our 4th meeting we planted all of our seedlings and seeds, we used containers because the school was not ready to commit to a gardening plot, *Figure 4*. Containers worked extremely well for us, providing a way for us to establish and maintain a garden. My sister and I lived in close proximity to the school so we decided to water the plants ourselves, simply to ensure the students would have the most successful harvest possible. We continued

to teach and learn as the garden grew, and on our final week we held a harvest party, where we harvested our food and ate it. We brought dishes that were made of the things we grew, so we decided to bring kale chips, radishes and cream cheese crackers, and various other versions to show how healthy eating can aslo taste really good. We also really recommend ending your program in this way, it helps reward the students for the work they've put in and show them ways they can make their garden foods taste better.

## THE RESULT

Overall our experience creating a gardening club at the local elementary school was an overwhelming success. The next year we started the same program at another elementary school, and we created another 4-H afterschool club that was a successful and rewarding experience. We will never forget when our first squash plant produced a healthy green squash, we harvested the squash and asked if

anyone would want to take it home to eat, *Figure 5*. Almost all the students' hands shot up, and they each began to plea, saying they wanted to take it home and show their parents. We hope that you can create a program that equally inspires your students, as well as encourages them to adopt the principles of healthy living and farm-to-table eating.



**FIGURE 5** Kids in the afterschool program loved healthy snacks from the garden!

