

impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

Moscow Middle School students build a school garden and compost lunch waste

AT A GLANCE

Afterschool club builds a school garden, incorporates 4-H gardening, wins Idaho Green School Award for composting and takes up 4-H Healthy Habits.

The Situation

Afterschool programs and clubs can benefit from University of Idaho Extension 4-H Youth Development activities and curricula. Moscow Middle School (MMS) teachers hosting an afterschool club focused on sustainability and gardening, the “MMS Earth Club,” requested support from the UI Extension, Latah County’s Small Farms and Horticulture program to help begin a school garden in 2014.

Our Response

UI Extension faculty, Iris Mayes, and AmeriCorps Member, Tess Jones, teamed up with the MMS teachers, Idaho Master Gardener volunteers and Backyard Harvest, a local non-profit focused on fresh food access, to purchase gardening supplies and tools. The school administration authorized a location for the school garden between sports fields. Youth in the club learned how to safely use drills and hardware to build four raised beds for their own garden. One of the beds was built at a height that can be accessed from a wheelchair or from a standing position.

Each year since 2015 students in the club have started seeds indoors in the winter and cared for the seedlings until they can be planted into the garden beds.



Volunteers assist Moscow Middle School Earth Club members in building garden beds in 2015 with ongoing use to 2022.

Installation of a drip irrigation system by master gardeners helped summer volunteers water and weed the garden until students returned in late August to resume club activities of weeding and harvesting.

In addition to hands-on gardening education, the club has engaged in activities and resources that enhance learning.

- Beginning in 2019 the MMS teachers and UI Extension sponsored a free “gift shop” in December to recycle gently used items or garden-themed gifts into holiday gifts, complete with earth-friendly wrapping and ribbons.
- University of Idaho Aldrich Entomological Club visits each year with trays of insects from the William F. Barr Entomological Museum.

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- A local beekeeper gave an interactive presentation on his commercial bee keeping operation to the club members in 2021.
- Club members had a field trip in 2021 to aid younger day campers in making outdoor art at a local nature center, Palouse-Clearwater Environmental Institute.

In 2021, the MMS teachers and parents of club members approved implementation of 4-H Healthy Habits curriculum for the MMS Earth Club for eight sessions in the winter months of 2022. The 4-H curriculum uses various lessons and cooking activities to teach youth healthy eating habits and fun physical activities they can engage in with friends and family.

Program Outcomes

The club has an average of 12 members each year with over 20 youth participating in special events. The program has served over 85 youth since the inception of the club.

Building on the momentum of having a school garden, the MMS shop teacher worked with students to build a three-part compost bin in 2016. Earth Club members hosted food scrap collection bins during the lunch hour to take compostable scraps out of the waste stream and help build soil for the garden. Moscow Middle School was awarded Idaho Green School of the Year in 2018 for this project and for full-school participation.

Youth in the Earth Club have learned to make observations in the garden, a key component of gardening and farming. They have shared their existing gardening knowledge with each other as well as learned various techniques for starting seeds, growing plants and building soil such as composting. Youth in the Earth Club provided a photo booth for the annual UI Extension Pollinator Summit each year beginning in February 2020 by making pollinator art.

Sixteen youth who participated in the 4-H Healthy Habits program learned about the unhealthy contents

of processed foods and beverages and learned eight different healthy recipes they could prepare for their families. All participants indicated that they would drink water instead of sugary beverages and prepare a healthy meal or snack for their family members.

Every season, Earth Club members have harvested fruits and vegetables such as rhubarb, strawberries, tomatoes and corn to make various snacks in the winter during club sessions.



Moscow Middle School Earth Club members check on the garden in February 2022.

The Future

UI Extension, Latah County's Small Farms and Horticulture program will continue to support the MMS Earth Club and Middle School Garden with faculty time, 4-H gardening curriculum, season-appropriate gardening lessons and Idaho Master Gardener time.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

Moscow School District administrators, teachers, students and parents; UI Extension, Latah County; Idaho Master Gardener; U of I Aldrich Entomological Club; William F. Barr Entomological Museum; Youth Climate Action; UI Extension 4-H Youth Development. The 4-H Healthy Habits lessons were supported through a grant from Idaho Department of Health and Welfare under the American Rescue Plan Act, 2021.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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