

The Riverside School Gardens

The Riverside School gardens are curriculum-driven, meaning the classroom objectives determine much of what we grow. You will note that certain practices of organic gardening are used. Though somewhat chaotic in appearance, the densely planted gardens with medicinal herbs growing everywhere cash in on the protective chaos of nature. No other means of controlling pests is used. We have tried many types of composting and have settled on methods that small children can handle, bins, sheet composting, and one big compost heap. We also use the Stout method of mulching heavily with straw.

The first bed is a drought tolerant border in an island in the driveway, a veritable oven. The Princeton Garden Club donated the funds for this project. The soil is very poor, but numerous plants survive, even with the deer.

Visitors will next see six raised "Lasagna Garden" beds with basil. These fit into a fourth grade math project on grids and area and will end up on the table on Pesto Day in September.

The main garden beds feature a sheet composting project by second graders and beds devoted to specific crops by grade. Third graders plant potatoes when reading the chapter book *Stone Fox*, while fourth graders plant a three sisters garden of corn, beans and squash. First graders study the rainbow and therefore plant a rainbow in their bed. And the entire garden is surrounded by a beneficial border to attract pollinators and repel unwanted critters.

The boxed herb garden has a key, and all the boxes contain plants that are safe to taste. Teachers and parents who are not knowledgeable can take small children to this garden and know that the plants are generally safe. This is where small children get their first lessons about garden safety; they start learning to identify plants from the first visit.

The next bed has just been tilled. It is planted with hairy vetch and will be planted with winter rye in the fall. These cover crops will help set nitrogen and add bio mass to the poor soil. You can see a mini-corn maze starting in one corner, a little surprise for the incoming kindergarteners.

The heart shaped garden is a memorial to a much loved teacher. Next to it is the newest bed, a butterfly garden that contains host plants for monarchs and black swallowtails, spicebush, and pipevines as well as an array of nectar plants. Note that we are starting to kill off grass in areas, using newspaper and straw to smother it. We will plant meadow flowers and meadow grasses to support pollinators.