



What is Farm to Early Care?

Farm to Early Care is dedicated to the incorporation of 3 main components in early childhood settings:

- Food and agriculture education: exploring and talking about food and farming
- Local purchasing: buying locally grown products
- Gardening: growing food

good for kids

Kids participating in Farm to Early Care programs are more willing to try new foods, eat more fruits and vegetables per day and eat a wider variety of fruits and vegetables in general.

Giving kids the chance to try delicious local foods during the early care age range reaches them when they are developing taste preferences and eating habits that will carry forward for the rest of their lives, setting the stage for long-term health benefits and lowering the chances of diet-related disease.

Kids in Farm to Early Care programs develop a deeper understanding of where food comes from and a sense of connection to their communities.

Reaching kids can also indirectly influence the food and nutrition behaviors of their school staff, family and community members.

Farm to Early Care fits perfectly with the hands-on learning techniques already used in early care environments.

good for farmers

Farm to Early Care programs open up an additional market for farmers to sell into, giving them another income stream in a diversified business model.

Selling to early cares can be a stepping stone to sell to additional wholesale markets, creating transferable skills that can grow farmers' businesses.

Sales to early cares potentially offer farmers the opportunity to make larger, more predictable sales than at a farmers' market, as well as the potential to plan ahead.

Farm to Early Care programs build farmer relationships with community members, strengthening support for buying local and highlighting farmers' vital role in the community.



Looking to add a fresh twist on nutrition education for the little ones in your care?

In this exhibit you'll find activities designed for early care providers and parents.

With activity plans for different fruits and vegetables, you can find games, songs, recipes, facts, storybooks and resources all in one place!

These documents were created in support of Farm to Early Care & Education efforts, which encompass gardening, nutrition education and purchasing of local produce.

Renewing the Countryside is dedicated to building a just, sustainable and vibrant rural America. We believe Farm to Early Care is a great way to connect urban, suburban and rural kids with their food origins. Check out our website for more early care activities and ideas!



www.pintsizeproduce.org

Made possible, in part, with funding from The Cargill Foundation

Hmong American Farmers Association

The Hmong American Farmers Association (HAFA), led by family farmers, is dedicated to advancing the prosperity of Hmong farmers. HAFA manages a 155-acre farm south of the Twin Cities where member families lease land and hone their business skills and agricultural practices.

While many member farmers sell their produce at farmers' markets, HAFA's Food Hub offers an opportunity for them to expand and diversify their sales. The Food Hub aggregates and sells members' produce to schools, retailers, institutions, and through community-supported agriculture (CSA) shares.

The latest Minnesotans to enjoy the abundance of the fresh produce grown at the HAFA farm are young children in St. Paul's Rondo-Frogtown and East Side neighborhoods. With support from the Cargill Foundation, Renewing the Countryside and HAFA have teamed up to provide CSA boxes to nine in-home childcares and the Hallie Q. Brown Early Learning Center.

"HAFA is proud to be partnering with Renewing the Countryside serving children in Early Care Centers & Providers with increased access to fresh, locally grown, and culturally appropriate produce grown by HAFA farmer members. A healthy life starts with healthy eating." - Janssen Hang, Executive Director HAFA

Rozi's Little Lovizs Child Care

Rosalyn Smaller, owner and operator of Rozi's Little Lovizs Child Care, started her relationship with nature and the outdoors early. An athletic and curious child, she benefitted from Rondo neighborhood rec centers like Hallie Q Brown that bussed young Black kids into the woods of Wisconsin for summer camps and nature appreciation trips. At home, she gardened with her aunts and often badgered her mother, with statements like, "Let's make a garden!" After getting her degree and working in human services, Rosalyn's love for gardening was re-awakened by community activists and land connectors who brought gardening boxes and education to adults and kids in her neighborhood.

When she bought her house, Rosalyn's first act as a homeowner was to plant a garden. Through a string of difficult circumstances, including getting breast cancer and losing her job, her garden served as a respite. When family and friends encouraged her to open her own early care center, Rosalyn saw gardening as an intrinsic component. At Rozi's Little Lovizs, the children plant year-round, learn to cook, and families share recipes with each other. You can find Rosalyn in her garden, teaching her grandbabies about the land and passing on the knowledge her community poured into her.



Roots and Wings Forest School

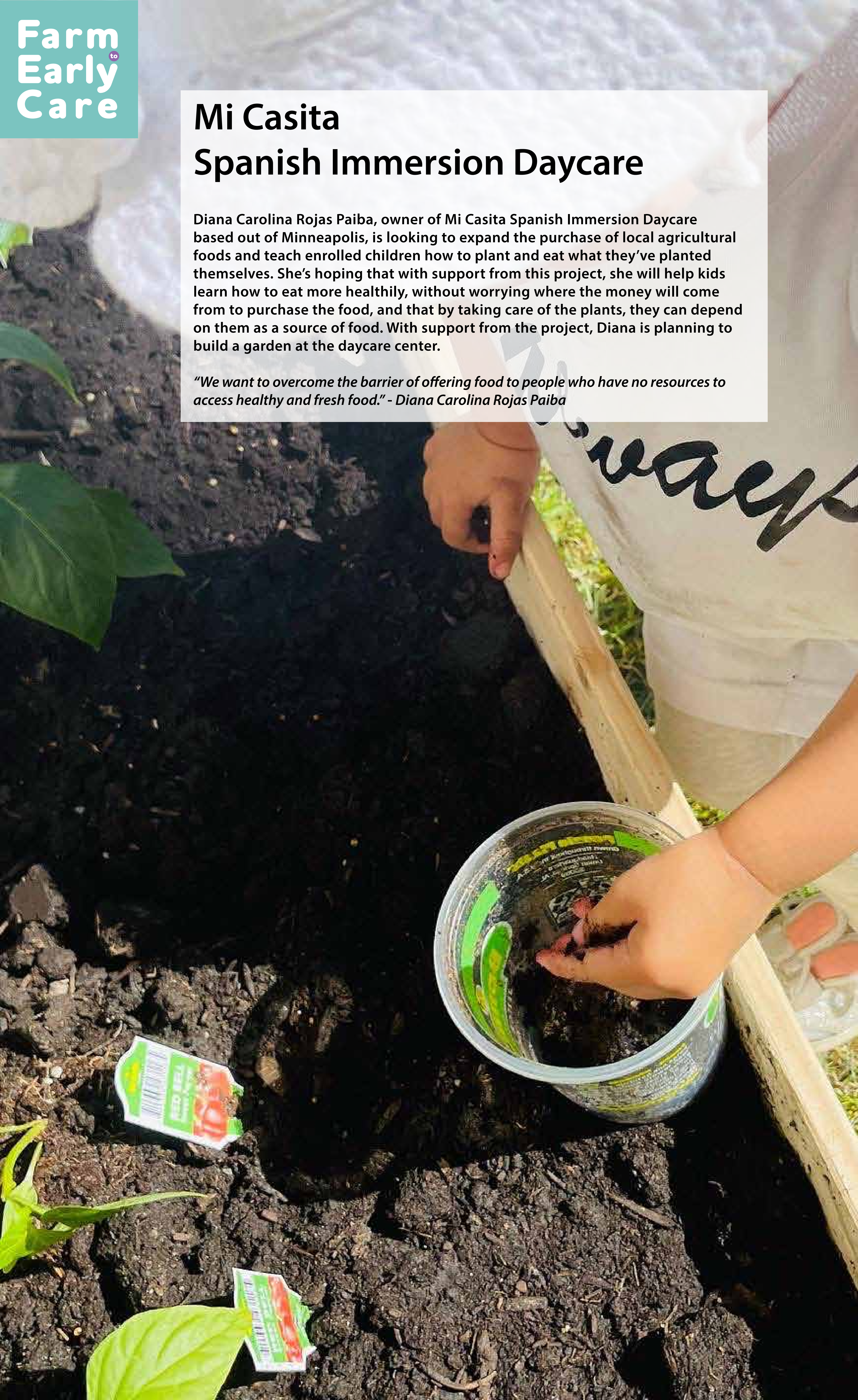
Leona Cichy of Roots and Wings Forest School in New York Mills, Minnesota is implementing a hands-on approach to teaching kids about food systems, growing foods, trying new foods, the importance of local foods, and the importance of pollinators in food production. This plan includes planting a veggie garden that the children in her care tend and grow. Their harvest is incorporated into the school's snack menu. Students also have the opportunity to learn about entrepreneurship by setting up a food stand during school pick-up time to sell goods to their parents.

"Teaching kids about where their food comes from is so important! Understanding the farm-to-table process allows them to have a greater appreciation for the foods we eat, the farmers that grow them, and the process it takes to get our food to our bellies." - Leona Cichy

Mi Casita Spanish Immersion Daycare

Diana Carolina Rojas Paiba, owner of Mi Casita Spanish Immersion Daycare based out of Minneapolis, is looking to expand the purchase of local agricultural foods and teach enrolled children how to plant and eat what they've planted themselves. She's hoping that with support from this project, she will help kids learn how to eat more healthily, without worrying where the money will come from to purchase the food, and that by taking care of the plants, they can depend on them as a source of food. With support from the project, Diana is planning to build a garden at the daycare center.

"We want to overcome the barrier of offering food to people who have no resources to access healthy and fresh food." - Diana Carolina Rojas Paiba



Care-A-Lot Child Care

Roxanne Stinar operates Care-A-Lot Child Care in Park Rapids, MN. She is dedicated to educating families about healthy eating through exposure to locally-grown foods and providing healthy recipes for preparing those foods. Children in Roxanne's care learn about growing and harvesting fresh produce by visiting a nearby prepared garden plot and by taking field trips to a local garden center, a u-pick blueberry farm, and the farmers market. She believes that by introducing new fruits and vegetables within peer groups, having time to cook together, and sharing recipes with their families, children are more likely to decide that they want to participate in gardening and try new fruits and veggies.

"By providing opportunities for the children to engage and learn, they will be proud to help provide healthy meals to bring home. They will try new foods and recipes and be excited to engage in lifelong learning about healthy living and eating." -Roxanne Stinar





Hallie Q. Brown Community Center

Located in St. Paul's Rondo neighborhood, the Hallie Q. Brown Early Learning Center (ELC) provides a safe, affordable learning environment for children of working parents and community residents. At the ELC, children gain skills and tools to prepare them for both Kindergarten and life beyond the classroom.

Part of this preparation includes developing healthy eating and living habits. As a Renewing the Countryside Farm to Early Care participant, ELC teachers receive tools, ideas, and support to help children develop a love and appreciation for healthy food. The Center also has a garden where children help to plant, grow, harvest—and eat—their very own produce.

"We have been so pleased with the Farm to Early Care Program. The children are more willing to try new foods. They are being exposed to a variety of fruits and vegetables and when they go shopping with their parents, they ask for what they have tried and enjoyed at school." - Angie Goettl, Director of Family Services

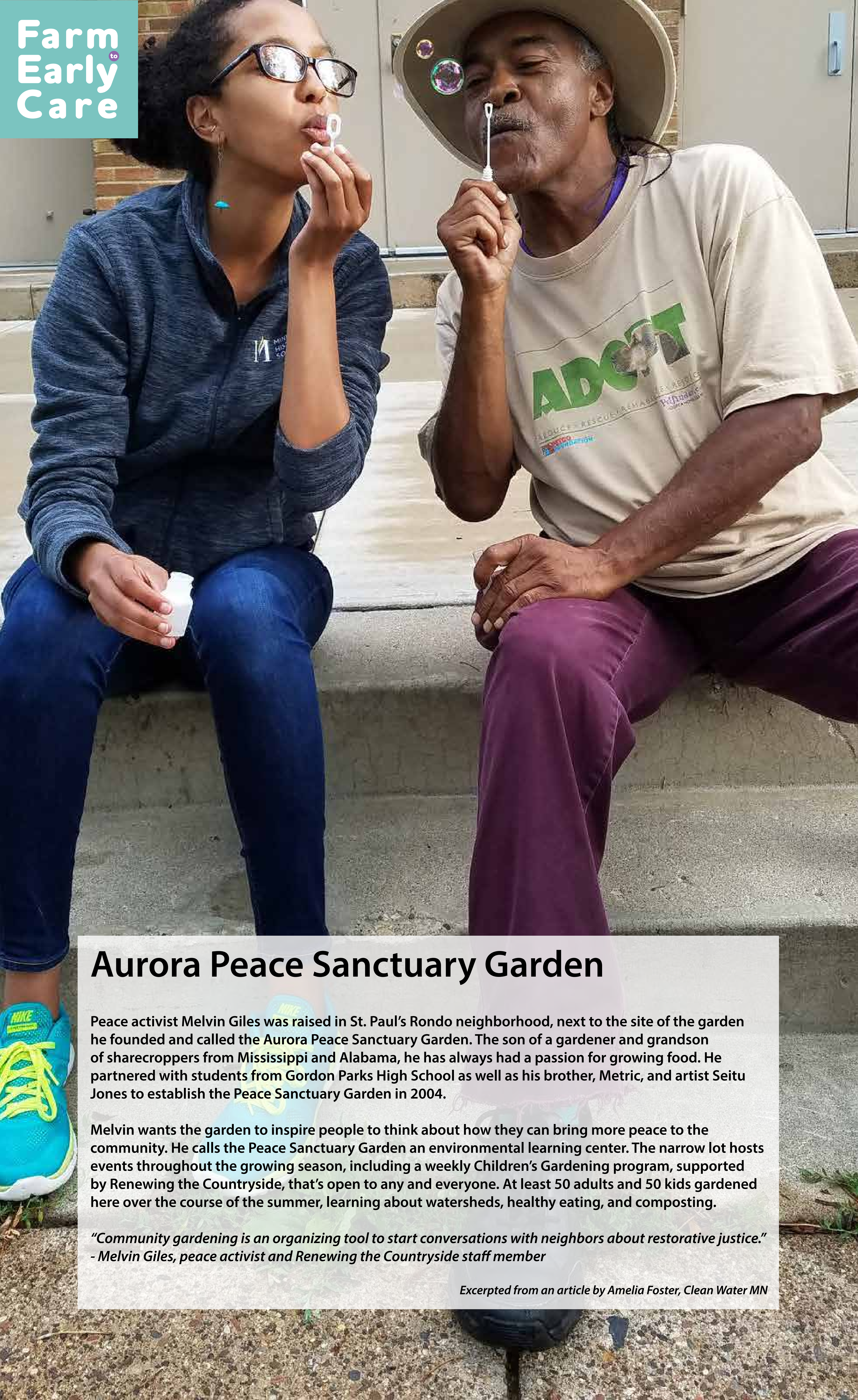


New Hope YMCA

Gardening is a life-skill/hobby, be it one patio tomato plant, a backyard family garden or an urban farm, that we can instill in the lives of the children we work with. Children at our YMCA Early Ed programs benefit from annual garden projects and harvesting. Through Farm to YMCA curriculum, developed by the YMCA of the North in partnership with Renewing the Countryside, children learn about nutrition, where their food comes from and the importance of local food. They also get to experience the process of planting and maintaining a garden. Gardening has many benefits for everyone involved, such as physical activity, self-esteem building, fine motor development, learning new vocabulary, aiding in alleviating anxiety, engaging in communal learning and recreation and lifelong skills. We also introduce career paths such as horticulture, agronomy, and plant science.

Classrooms start seeds, transplant donated plants, grown new plants from grocery store purchases and sow seeds directly into the ground. They also do taste tests of their harvest and make dishes that include the produce they have grown.

"Many children and young teachers are removed from growing, harvesting, storing their own food and sustainability. Worms aerate, plants breathe, and bees pollinate. We are happy to be able to share this joy with our children and teams." - Ms. Chris N., Preschool Teacher, New Hope YMCA Early Childhood Learning Center



Aurora Peace Sanctuary Garden

Peace activist Melvin Giles was raised in St. Paul's Rondo neighborhood, next to the site of the garden he founded and called the Aurora Peace Sanctuary Garden. The son of a gardener and grandson of sharecroppers from Mississippi and Alabama, he has always had a passion for growing food. He partnered with students from Gordon Parks High School as well as his brother, Metric, and artist Seitu Jones to establish the Peace Sanctuary Garden in 2004.

Melvin wants the garden to inspire people to think about how they can bring more peace to the community. He calls the Peace Sanctuary Garden an environmental learning center. The narrow lot hosts events throughout the growing season, including a weekly Children's Gardening program, supported by Renewing the Countryside, that's open to any and everyone. At least 50 adults and 50 kids gardened here over the course of the summer, learning about watersheds, healthy eating, and composting.

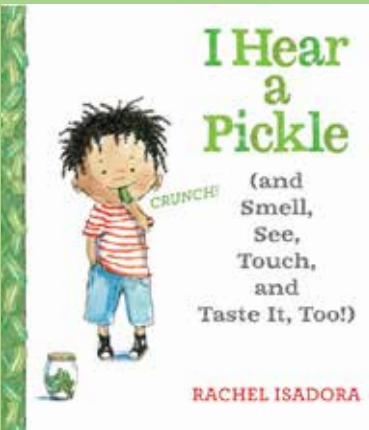
"Community gardening is an organizing tool to start conversations with neighbors about restorative justice."
- Melvin Giles, peace activist and Renewing the Countryside staff member

Excerpted from an article by Amelia Foster, Clean Water MN



STORY TIME

I Hear a Pickle (and Smell, See, Touch, and Taste It, Too!)
by Rachel Isadora.
Watch a video of the story read aloud here:



Talk about our senses and how we use each of them when we eat!



Alternate: “I Will Never, Not Ever Eat a Tomato”
by Lauren Child

Do You Eat Your Vegetables?

(Tune: “The Muffin Man”)

Do you eat your vegetables, vegetables, vegetables?
Do you eat your vegetables, every single day?

Continue with specific vegetables and names:
Maria eats her cucumbers, cucumbers, cucumbers.
Maria eats her cucumbers, every single day.

Sing Along

ACTIVITY

This is an easy cooking activity where young eaters can put cucumber slices into a jar. Give toddlers their own jar so slices that go in mouths don’t end up in the pickles!

Refrigerator Pickles

1. Thinly slice small to medium size cucumbers – pickling “Kirby” cucumbers or seedless cucumbers work best, but any you have will do!
2. Put slices into a mason jar or other lidded container.
3. Add salt and dill (if using), then add vinegar. Seal with a lid and shake to mix.
4. Place in refrigerator; shake again after a couple of hours.

These can be eaten as soon as 2 hours after making or will last a couple of weeks in the refrigerator.

Tasting: 

Cucumbers are delicious eaten raw.

There are lots of great ways to try cucumbers. Crunch one raw, dip it, or make a cucumber sandwich with bread and cream cheese. Take your pick!



Carbon Footprint.



This one’s tricky. Sometimes the economies of scale from massive monoculture vegetable farms in Chili or California have an advantage... *sometimes*. But when in season, local cucumbers don’t have nearly as far to travel to arrive on your plate and can leave a lighter carbon “footprint.”



Consider a weekly visit to the farmers’ market to buy all your produce for the week. And when certain produce is not in season, embrace the seasonality! If you’re buying butternut squash in June or cucumbers in December, just remember the travel time. Has your cucumber gone on a longer trip this year than you?

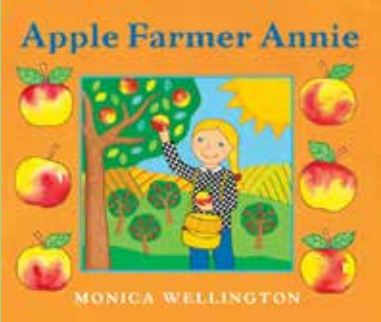




**STORY
TIME**

Apple Farmer Annie
by Monica Wellington

Watch a video of the story read
aloud here:



Some items to point out:
Trees/orchard
Different varieties/colors of apples
Farmers market stand

**GET
MOVING**

**Three
Red
Apples**

Adapted from a song by Apple Jean Warren

Way up high in an apple tree (put arms up)
Three red apples smiled at me (point to corners of mouth)
I shook that tree as hard as I could (pretend to shake tree)
Down came the apple (wave arms down)
Mmmm, it was good! (rub stomach)

ACTIVITY

For younger children, consider an interactive activity instead of a book. One possibility: play dough! Make red and green play dough, and discuss the color and shape of apples. Supply cookie cutters or shapes to press in the dough - apples, the letter A, trees, etc. Older children can also make their own ball ‘apple’ or worm ‘stem’. Play Dough Recipe:

- 3 cups flour
- 1-1/2 cups salt
- 3 cups water
- 2 Tablespoons cooking oil
- 1 Tablespoon cream of tartar
- food coloring

Combine all ingredients except food coloring in saucepan. Cook over low heat, stirring constantly, until the dough comes away from the sides of the pan and is hard to stir. Remove mixture from the pan. When cool, add food coloring and knead until color is distributed. Store in airtight container.

Tasting: 🍏 🍏 🍏 🍏

Select several varieties of local apples. Include distinct differences – size, texture, color. Haralson and Honeycrisp contrast tart and sweet varieties, for example.

After tasting and comparing the various apples, discuss: Are the apples sweet or tart? Soft or crunchy?



**Benefits Local
Economy**



Supporting local farmers and others in the local food supply chain keeps money circulating regionally.



Not only that but supporting local farmers has other societal benefits. For instance, when we support rural farmers we also support participation in local communities like churches, fraternal organizations, rural libraries, sportsman’s clubs, and schools... just to name a few.

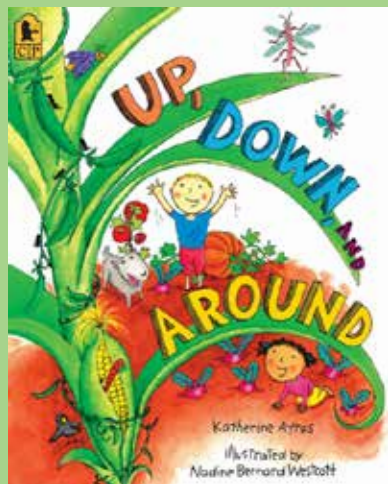




STORY TIME

Up, Down and Around
by Katharine Ayres

Watch a video of *Up, Down and Around* here:



Read the book through once, and then repeat, having children act out up, down and around.
Discuss the different parts of plants. What part do we eat for different fruits and vegetables: the fruit, the leaves, the root?



EAT A BEET

(Tune: "If You're Happy and you Know It")

SING ALONG

If you're hungry and you know it, eat a beet!
If you're hungry and you know it, eat a beet!

Beets are red, orange and striped;
Open wide, and take a bite!

If you're hungry and you know it, eat a beet!

ACTIVITY

This activity lets younger children practice putting tape on the paper and holding a paintbrush. Preschoolers can make patterns with tape and make a painting!



- Peel and chop a beet; cover in water, and microwave until soft.
- Give children a piece of paper and brush. Provide pieces of tape to make a pattern on paper, if desired.
- Pour small portions of the brightly colored water into containers, and let kids paint with the watercolor!
- Talk about the colors of beets, and where the beet grows (under the ground).

Tasting: Beet Salad

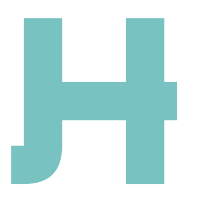
Peel and chop beets; cover with water, and microwave until soft. **SAVE** the water to paint with! Or hard boil a couple eggs in the beet water - makes lovely pink shells!

Consider offering raw beets as well. Grate beets, and add a little dressing or orange juice to coat. Compare flavor and texture!



Tastes Better!

We might be biased, but we think eating local just tastes better. Have you ever had a grocery store strawberry from 2000 miles away that is as good as a local strawberry?



Many foods have been bred to withstand long-distance transportation, industrial processing, and to achieve a consistent size and appearance—sometimes to the detriment of taste.



Since locally grown produce usually doesn't have to travel very far or sit in storage for long it retains more nutrients.



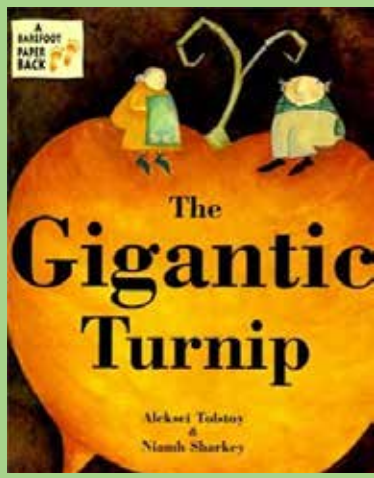


TURNIPS

STORY TIME

The Gigantic Turnip
by Katharine Ayres

Tell the story of *The Gigantic Turnip*. Use the book or make your own storyboard. Kids can help decorate the characters!



Consider having kids repeat and act out with you as “they pulled, and they pulled, and they pulled, but the turnip WOULDN’T COME UP!”

TURNIPS

GET MOVING

Dig a little hole, plant a turnip seed.
Pour a little water, pull a little weed.

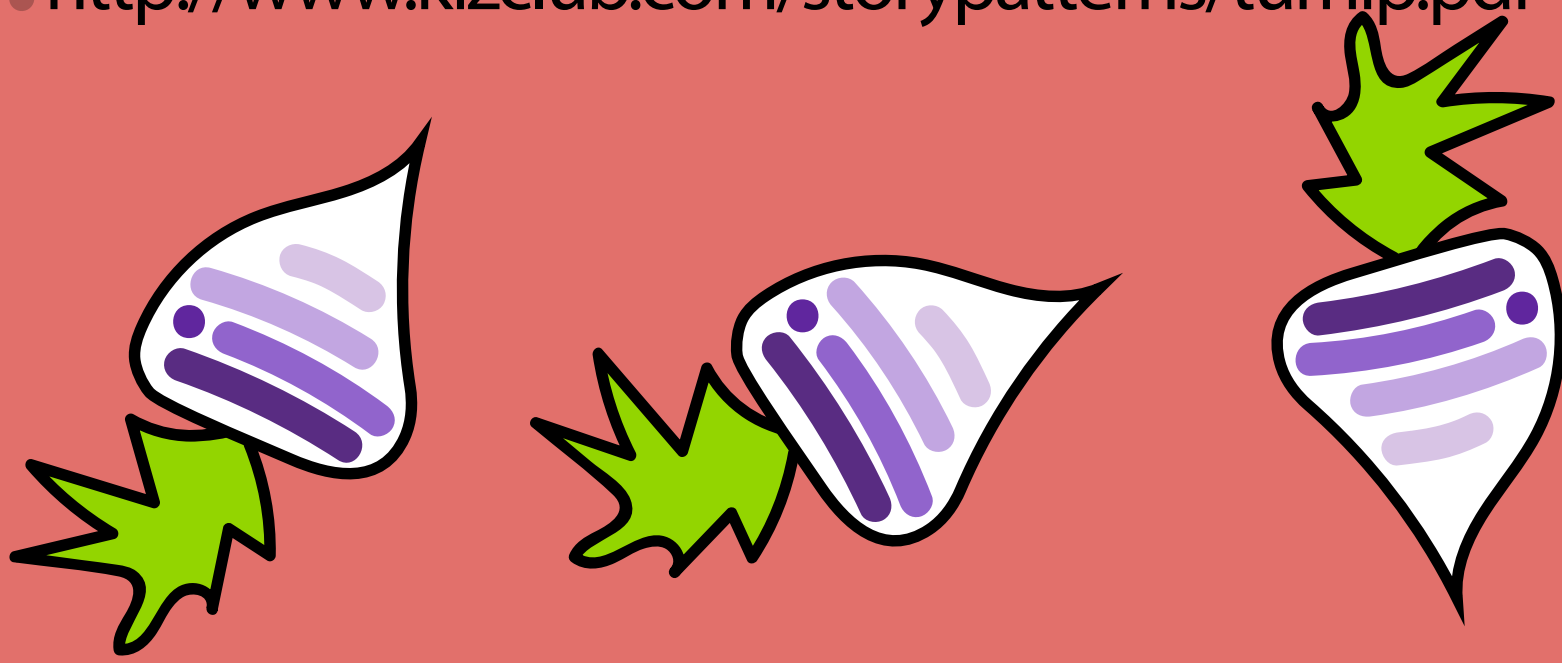
Give a little sunshine, and what do you know?
Your seed will be a little plant and grow, grow, grow.

Turnips, turnips, turnips, grow so slow.
Hurry, hurry, hurry and grow, grow, grow!

ACTIVITY

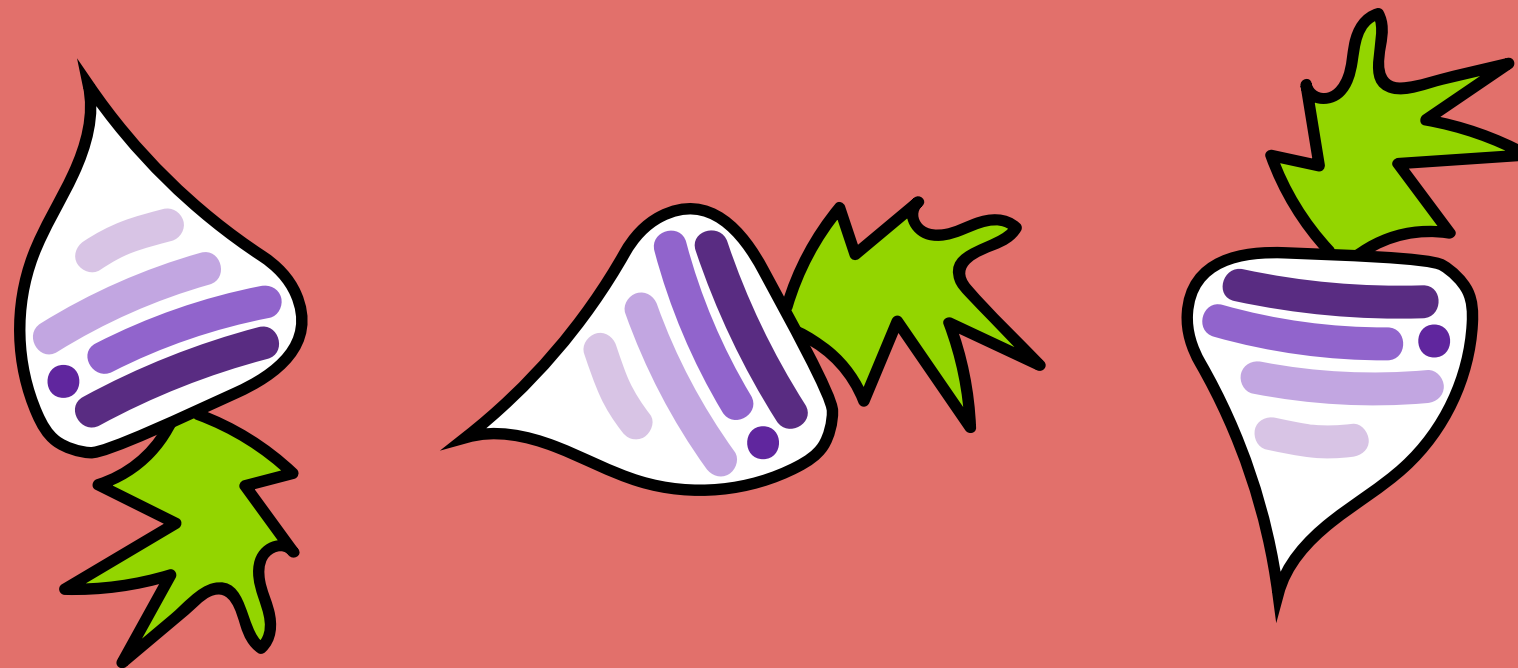
This activity can help younger children practice fine motor skills, and provide an opportunity to talk about colors and turnips!

Printable shapes for making a storyboard:
<http://www.kizclub.com/storypatterns/turnip.pdf>



Turnip Cutouts:

1. Cut a turnip shape out of a piece of construction paper.
2. Affix double sided tape to cover the cutout.
3. Cut small squares of purple, green and white tissue paper.
4. Have toddlers place pieces of tissue paper over the cutout.



Tasting: Roasted Turnips

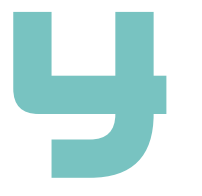
Roasted turnips are delicious! Peel and roast at 350 degrees tossed with dry herbs, salt and papper until soft, approximately 30 minutes.

You can also peel and steam turnips in the microwave. Add a little water to a dish with the turnip(s) and microwave approximately 3 minutes or until turnips are soft. Add butter, salt and pepper, and eat!



Protects Ecosystems

Buying local can also help to protect local ecosystems and wildlife. Get to know your local farmer, and ask them about their sustainability or regenerative practices. Support local farmers and producers who actively protect protect soil, water and air quality.



Local food farmers likely live relatively close to urban or metropolitan centers. These farmers are often less likely to sell their farm to developers who could completely transform the land, devastating the ecosystem and the wildlife that calls it home.

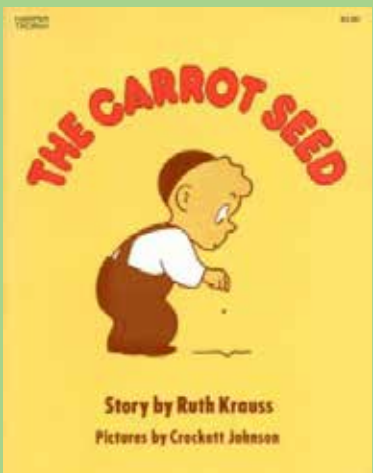


CARROTS

STORY TIME

The Carrot Seed
by RUTH KRAUSS

Watch a video of *The Carrot Seed* here:



Questions you might ask while reading:

- What does the little boy give the plant to help it grow?
- What did everyone keep telling the little boy?

Highlight that the carrot is a root vegetable, so the part we usually eat grows beneath the soil.



PLANTING SONG

(Tune: "The Farmer in the Dell")

It's time to plant the seeds.
It's time to plant the seeds,.

Heigh-ho, the derry-o,

It's time to plant the seeds.

SING ALONG

ACTIVITY



For this activity you will need egg cartons and orange and green pipe cleaners enough for each child.

Note: The egg carton can be cut and separated so children can have their own "carrot patch."

Carrot Tops and Bottoms:

1. Use a scissors to poke a small hole in each carton, if there isn't one already.
2. Make carrots by folding the orange pipe cleaners around the green ones and twisting, as pictured in photo #2. Make sure the tops are easy for little fingers to grab.
3. Push carrots through the holes in the egg carton, and have students pull them up and collect them in their garden basket!

Talk about the colors of carrots and where the carrot grows (under the ground).

Tasting: Carrot Salad

This salad is a fun way to get preschoolers involved in preparing food, preparing food. They are often more willing to try unfamiliar flavor combinations if they helped put the dish together!

1. Grate carrots – little hands can help.
2. Add raisins, pineapple chunks and sunflower seeds, if using.
3. Stir in mayonnaise, just enough to coat the salad.



Less Packaging



It is common at farmers markets and farm stands to find bulk produce without packaging. Sure, this is also common in grocery stores, but I've never seen a cob of corn on a styrofoam tray and shrink-wrapped with plastic at the farmers market. Doesn't corn already come with its very own (rather convenient) packaging?

Plus you can bring your own reusable bags to carry home your farmers market finds. This equates to less waste, particularly of plastic packaging and plastic bags.

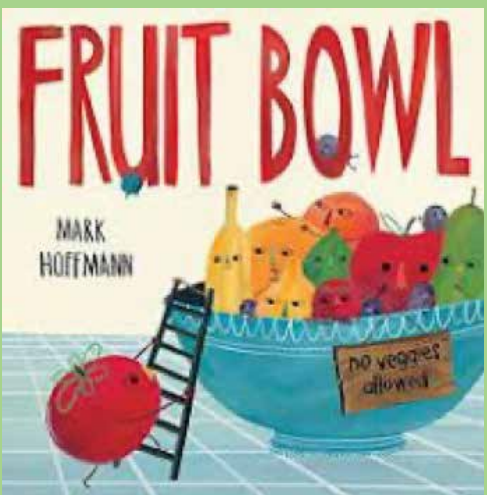


STORY TIME

Fruit Bowl
by RUTH KRAUSS

(To

Watch a video of *Fruit Bowl* here:



This book can be used to discuss why tomatoes are fruits and to explore the importance of including others and how it feels to be left out.



SING ALONG

One Little Tomato

the tune of "One little, two little, three little fingers"

One little, two little, three little tomatoes
(one, two, three fingers up - and continue with the song)
Four little, five little, six little tomatoes
Seven little, eight little, nine little tomatoes
Ten little tomatoes in the garden!

Pick one, pick two, pick three tomatoes
Pick four, pick five, pick six tomatoes

Pick seven, pick eight, pick nine tomatoes
Ten little tomatoes in the basket!

ACTIVITY



Tomato, Tomato, Where Can You Be?

1. Have children cover their eyes while the teacher hides the tomato around the room and sings: "Tomato, Tomato, Where can you be? Tomato, Tomato, 1...2...3..."
2. When you get to 3, have the children open their eyes and look for the tomato.
3. The teacher can give height clues, such as: the tomato is chair height, desk height or as high as a shoe.
4. When a child finds the tomato, they say, "Tomato, Tomato, I found the tomato!"
5. This person then gets to hide the tomato next.

Tasting: Try Different Types

Exploring tomatoes can be done with one kind of tomato or different varieties.

1. Have children guess how many seeds are in the tomato.
3. Let children watch you slice the tomato open and count the seeds, or let older children count the seeds in their own slice.
4. Have children taste small slices of each variety to compare and contrast.



Biodiversity

Buying local foods encourages biodiversity. Often at the farmers' market you will find tomatoes that are referred to as "heirloom varieties." They are seldomly grown commercially because they are fragile, thus making them more difficult to ship long distances.



There are over 10,000 varieties of tomatoes that come in a variety of different colors, including pink, purple, black, yellow and white.



In the picture above, you can see a fully ripe "Green Zebra" tomato - what kid wouldn't eat that!

Farm to Early Care



RENEWING THE COUNTRYSIDE THANKS OUR PARTNERS •



PowerUp is a community wellness initiative from HealthPartners. It improves the health of members, patients and families with programs, tools and resources to promote eating better, moving more and feeling good, including healthy recipes, activities and games for kids and educational videos.



The Cargill Foundation is committed to closing the opportunity gap for our Black, Indigenous and Children of Color from low income households in our Twin Cities headquarters community through investments in education and nutrition.

AND FOR THE SUPPORT FROM •

Co-op Partners Warehouse

Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy

Minnesota Farm to Early Care Network

Association of State Public Health Nutritionists

Office of Statewide Health Improvement Initiatives (OSHII), Minnesota Department of Health