TEAM Punta Gorda
Volunteers For A Better Community

The YMCA student garden on Cooper Street in Punta Gorda continues to produce food, flowers and excitement for the students.

Special Report by Volunteers Margaret Whitney and Carol McDonald

Last week, we decided to switch up our routine and start each session with the least preferred job which is clean-up. The students put on their kid-sized gloves, and we worked together bagging up random debris and disposing of it. Once that business was done, we got to work examining any changes and planning for that week's session.

The students began our discussion of observations by leading Carol and me to the plants that are produced and ready to harvest. This is their favorite part! They eagerly pick the produce and bring it inside to clean and bag to bring home.

We are now keeping a journal of weekly notes to include student observations, harvesting, planting, and other details relating to tasks completed. Here are a few of our notes:



The second planting of pickling cucumbers is thriving and climbing up the bamboo structure we built. The Cherokee purple tomatoes are producing beautiful purple-green tomatoes. The red peppers are now turning bright red signaling they're ready to pick. The beds continue to burst with fresh herbs: basil, parsley, thyme, oregano, and garlic chive. Bok choy has been particularly successful in our garden. We've been instructing the students to snip the outer mature leaves allowing the inner smaller leaves to continue to grow. Several bags of bok choy have been sent home to be cooked, and we await reports from the students.

A few weeks ago we harvested carrots and beets. We sauteed them in butter and served them to the students along with another batch of cilantro lime rice. They devoured every last morsel! One mom commented that her son claimed he didn't like vegetables, but he ate his serving and even asked for a second portion. Mom was surprised and impressed!

However, not all our crops were a success. We are impressed with the students' ability to tolerate occasional failures. Of course, Carol has repeatedly swooped in to save the day by delivering, to the students, replacement plants that are more resistant. So far, we've lost several tomato plants to yellow leaf curl virus. Our basil and pickling cukes succumbed to the cold, but the students were most disappointed with their most anticipated crop of strawberries. We've gotten very few berries as we're in competition with the local critters. Good news though, we have a plan for next year. Carol has an idea to construct a vertical planter so we can plant more strawberries which will elevate them off the wet ground and away from critters. We'll be looking for ideas for that project next fall. (L, Carol McDonald works with a young student)



We'd like to thank a few folks who have donated plants for the student garden. We truly appreciate their generosity!

- Debbie, from the History Park Community Garden, donated several bok choy plants
- Caitlin, from the Punta Gorda Library, donated several bags of cow peas to be used as a cover crop to feed and protect the beds over the summer



Thank you TEAM Punta Gorda and the YMCA for continuing to make this project possible! A special thank you to Nicole and Lilly for their weekly assistance in coordinating the students and helping with supervision. They are a delight to work with!

With much gratitude,

Your Volunteers:
Margaret Whitney
Carol McDonald
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