

During a mid-year 2025 TEAM board meeting, a community project focused on children was discussed. The board wholeheartedly endorsed this idea, allocating funds specifically for the development of educational gardens. Andrea Cappuccilli, a board member and Associate Executive Director of the Cooper Street YMCA after-school program for students in grades two through five, played a key role in this initiative.

The agreed-upon plan was to establish a garden where children could learn about planting and cultivating vegetables. TEAM Punta Gorda facilitated this process by providing and installing raised beds, adding soil, and providing all supplies for the program. Once preparations were completed, the children began to participate in planting and watering activities.



The children were encouraged to express their preferences regarding what they wished to plant. Based on their suggestions, ingredients such as tomatoes, peppers, cilantro, onions, and other items suitable for salsa were included. Additional requests from the children led to the planting of strawberries, potatoes, and pickles. At



the Cooper Street gardens, there are now five raised beds filled with different vegetables chosen by children.

TEAM volunteer Margaret Whitney continues to lead weekly instructional sessions, demonstrating essential gardening tasks, with assistance provided by fellow volunteer Carol McDonald. Every Monday, 14 children and 2 counselors work alongside Margaret and Carol, engaging in both educational and recreational activities, such as plant-themed coloring sheets. The enthusiastic young gardeners (they call themselves the “YMCA Green Thumbs”) are asked each week before watering what they have learned about gardening.



Andrea Cappuccilli has reported receiving favorable feedback from both counselors and children, highlighting the activity’s ability to engage participants in diverse challenges and foster an appreciation of gardening’s impact. Additionally, Andrea published an article in the parent newsletter to update families on the project’s progress.



Do you have a viable idea for a community outreach project? The TEAM board of directors encourages you to share that suggestion. Send your ideas to team@teampuntagorda.org.

Thank you, TEAM volunteers (l. to r.) Margaret Whitney, Ron Knight, board members Angela Cappuccilli, Betsy Spagnolo and Darcy Hanley.

More photos to enjoy at www.teampuntagorda.org/school-gardens