



## Mission to Mars Program: Demonstration Garden, Walnut Creek

By UC Master Gardener, Cristina K.

On March 16th, a group of 17 sophomore students from Athenian School who are currently participating in an intensive course entitled Mission To Mars, to study the many aspects of space travel and colonization of Mars, attended an outdoor program at “Our Garden”, a UC Master Gardener demonstration garden located in Shadelands, Walnut Creek. They learned about some specific horticulture topics within the context of space travel and exploration.

We had several Master Gardeners on hand to talk about the various aspects of gardening, who also included a discussion on the cognitive impacts of space travel on the brain by one of our Master Gardeners who received a grant from NASA for this study, which he undertook for 10 years. This grabbed the students' attention and they were engaged and participating in the 90 minute session, learning about gardening, composting and the symbiotic relationship between fungi and plants.

The students also toured the garden and had ample opportunities to ask questions regarding the various areas in the garden such as the orchard, the grape vines and the family garden, and they were given a demonstration of our amazing solar compost tumbler. The students were thoroughly engaged and came away with a lot of great information along with a fundamental understanding that learning is a life-long experience. The teachers expressed tremendous appreciation for not only the content taught and its impact on the students, but also its relevance to the coursework. For the students and Master Gardener presenters, it was an event to remember. The students collectively constructed a large thank-you poster that was imagined, planned and designed entirely by the students at Athenian.



Photo by Joie Spinelli

“Thank you” Art by Athenian High School students for Master Gardener presenters at “Our Garden” in Shadelands, Walnut Creek.

