

## The Edible Schoolyard

Read how Alice Waters put her “aim of education” quote into action in the **Going Beyond** folder for Chapter 11 at [EffectiveTeaching.com](http://EffectiveTeaching.com).

### A Sense of Purpose

Students today are bombarded by fast food, instant messaging, consumerism, and multi-million-dollar media.

Now, walk onto the campus of Martin Luther King Junior Middle School in Berkeley, California. There, you'll find students sitting in a gorgeous, ecologically-built kitchen that overlooks an acre-wide garden. They are deep in conversation with their peers and teachers as they dig in to freshly prepared Pumpkin and Kale Soup. Remember, these are middle school kids—hormones on feet! They are living proof that schools can be the positive example for their health and their lives with the Edible Schoolyard.

### How It Started

Twelve years ago, chef and author Alice Waters, along with then-principal Neil Smith, realized that America's growing problems with ecology, waste, and poor nutrition need to be solved through the school system.

After all, students are the number one target for media-driven messages that food is cheap and abundant. More often than not, they eat highly processed meals cooked by strangers or even machines. Sadly, today's children rarely sit down with their families to share dinner, and they often eat alone. Believe it or not, this attitude toward food and eating can be traced back to school lunch.

As Waters writes, “In school cafeterias, students learn how little we care about the way they nourish themselves—we've sold them to the lowest bidder.”

So Waters and Smith decided to replace their asphalt schoolyard with an interactive Edible Garden.

M. L. King Middle School is a public school with about 1,000 students in grades 6-8. It is a very diverse group, socially, economically, and culturally. More than twenty languages are spoken in the students' collective homes. The school used to be surrounded by a large blacktop schoolyard. The school's cafeteria had been closed because it was no longer large enough to accommodate all the students. Microwaveable packaged food was sold from a shack at the end of the parking lot.

Waters, Smith, and members of the community began discussing the appalling state of the school. When they noticed the blacktop schoolyard was large enough for an enormous garden, they initiated an edible landscape.

Planning began in 1995. Two years later, more than an acre of asphalt parking lot had been cleared. A cover crop was planted to enrich the soil, and in 1997, the school's unused 1930s cafeteria kitchen was refurbished to house the kitchen classroom. Today, the program is integrated into the middle school's daily life. The program consists of three components that complete the educational experience: classroom, kitchen, and garden.

### The Program

A standardized curriculum is integrated into tending and harvesting the garden. Students learn diversity through cooking foods from other cultures and studying native produce. In a participatory environment, students gain a better understanding and appreciation for the way nature sustains life, for nutrition, for

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meaningful work, and for fresh, natural food. They are taught not only math, science, and English, but also ethics, tolerance, community, and respect.

Garden classes teach the principles of ecology, origins of food, and respect for all living systems. Students work together to shape and plant beds, amend soil, turn compost, and harvest flowers, fruits, and vegetables.

In the kitchen classroom, students prepare and eat delicious seasonal dishes from produce they have grown in the garden. The full cycle of food production is completed in the kitchen, as students eat fruits, vegetables, and grains grown in soil rich with the compost of last season's produce.

Teachers provide students with direct instruction in support of kitchen and garden activities, such as plant structure and function, composting, vermiculture, and vocabulary. Because all students participate in the Edible Schoolyard, teachers reference garden and kitchen experiences to activate prior knowledge and support the teaching of key concepts.

This kind of participatory learning assists greatly in opening minds. The Edible Schoolyard has shown that if you offer children a new dish, there is only a 50 percent chance they will choose it. But if they've been introduced to the dish ahead of time, and have helped prepare it, they will all want to try it.

### **The Edible Schoolyard Flourishes**

Today, the Edible Schoolyard, a non-profit program, has joined with the International Slow Food movement to support diversity, tradition, and character through the daily ritual of the table. This "Slow Food, Slow Schools" movement is paving the way into a new era of education—one in which the public school system will be a means of both academic and character growth, where our students will learn to succeed by finding beauty and meaning in their lives.

For more information on this program, go to [www.edibleschoolyard.org](http://www.edibleschoolyard.org).