

# Van Buren students have green thumb

By Rusty Ebert  
Editor

Van Buren elementary students are going green and having fun in the process.

Since this spring, students have been growing many different vegetables in their own garden adjacent to the school. This is the second year that students have been growing vegetables

in the garden, which serves many purposes, according to staff members. Students learn where food comes from and how to cultivate and grow it.

Van Buren received a grant to help serve nutritious snacks and meals during the summer camp. They decided to get the kids involved in preparing it, as well. "We figure if they grow it or help prepare it, they will be more likely to try to eat it," said

Jane Graf, who helped organize the recently completed Van Buren School Camp.

"For example, students snapped beans at camp and then ate them the next day," Graf said. Students also shucked corn at the camp and enjoyed a tasty treat the following day.

"We found out that more students ate green beans when they helped snap them," Graf said. According to Sara Sprouse,

school nurse, the garden is made possible by many people.

"Fred Dunkin is allowing us to use his property and Bob Vaughn tilled it this spring."

Both Dunkin and Vaughn are bus drivers for Van Buren.

Sprouse said volunteers are weeding the garden during the school's summer vacation. She is appreciative of that support, as a large garden depends on hours of help.

"During the summer camp, you could find kids out here weeding the garden, as well," Sprouse said.

This spring each class planted their own sections, she said.

Kindergartners planted the pumpkin patch, first graders melons, herbs and peppers, second graders strawberries, onions and garlic, third graders corn, bean and squash, and the fourth and fifth graders helped plant the ingredients for pizza, lettuce, basil and oregano, as well as peppers and tomatoes. You can also find carrots,

cauliflower, beets and many other goodies throughout the garden.

The theme for the summer camp emphasized caring for the environment, so the garden concept fit in very well. Students used recycled paper for mulch.

This fall, students will be busy harvesting their products. Any produce not used by the students during school lunch is donated to Heavenly Hands food pantry.

Sprouse would eventually like to get a cold frame that automatically raises and lowers depending on the temperature, to allow students to extend the growing season.

Just as Sprouse was explaining the garden, her daughter, Emily, a soon to be third grader, smiling, holding freshly-picked vegetables.

"Look at that!" Sara exclaimed, "fresh carrots and beets."

The excitement the students have in their new endeavor,

makes the project all while, school officials said.

Sprouse said the school ed a team nutrition grant the Department of Education which helped pay for some of the items.

Last year Wasko had donated seed and the past years, the PTO has donated money. This year, PTO president, Sprouse said.

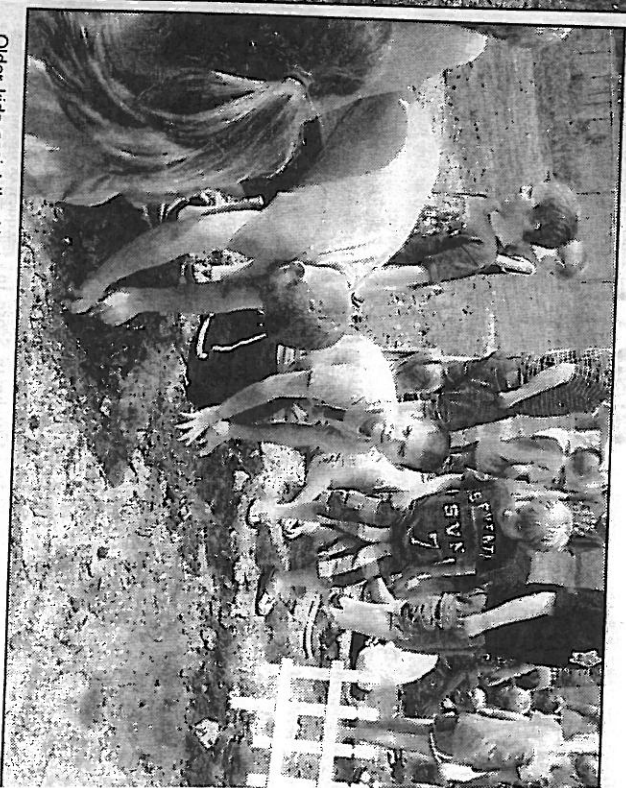
Kim Steele-Blair got the garden started, she added.

"She gave us ideas and provided resources to the staff, such as praying mantis and good bug/had bug posters. She is also donating the money," Sprouse said. Beyer also has provided assistance.

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Emily Sprouse displays fresh beets and carrots that were harvested at the Van Buren elementary garden at Douds. PHOTO SUBMITTED.



Older kids assist the kindergarten students in planting their "Pumpkin Patch" at the Van Buren elementary garden. PHOTO SUBMITTED.