

# impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

## Out of School, Into the Garden enhances learning opportunities for youth

### AT A GLANCE

Over 1,392 children in south central Idaho were engaged in gardening activities designed to boost science learning, teamwork, healthy eating and social skills in afterschool and childcare settings.

### The Situation

Farm to School is a strategy that addresses childhood learning and establishes healthy habits by increasing access to fresh foods, encouraging the development of healthy eating and experiential learning opportunities through hands-on food-related activities. However, school is not the only learning environment in which to introduce children to the benefits of eating fresh produce, gardening and connecting with local farms.

### Our Response

University of Idaho Extension created Out of School, Into the Garden to connect children and communities to fresh, local produce and garden-based science enrichment in afterschool and childcare centers across south central Idaho. The program was supported through a grant from the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare under the American Rescue Plan Act, 2021.

Program objectives were threefold: support access to youth gardening activities; increase educational opportunities through hands-on learning in STEM and healthy living; and provide mentoring for successful garden establishment and maintenance.



A Lincoln County Youth Center participant prepares to transplant a pea plant into the garden. Photo by Maureen Toomey.

The program funded youth garden development or expansion and provided participating sites with the bilingual National 4-H Junior Master Gardener Learn, Grow, Eat, Go! curriculum and delivered training on how to use it. The program team supported sites by assisting with recruitment, screening and training of community volunteers to serve as garden mentors.

Sites were reimbursed for purchases of approved garden supplies for educational and horticultural science activities. The program team designed nine family newsletters with tips, recipes and garden highlights for sites to distribute to participants.

Each site also received funds to host a summer open house and garden tour for youth, families and community members.

## Program Outcomes

Out of School, Into the Garden enrolled nine sites in Lincoln, Cassia, Blaine and Twin Falls counties. Children selected and started seeds indoors and transferred starts to the garden pots or beds. They helped lay straw and soil mulch, and organized greenhouses. Throughout the summer children grew and harvested 47 types of edible plants, vegetables, herbs and fruits.

Seven garden mentors were screened and trained and volunteered in the garden design process and season-long troubleshooting.

Afterschool and childcare center staff and garden mentors used the Junior Master Gardener curriculum to teach and lead activities combining nutrition, botany, entomology, horticultural science, art, food preparation and fresh vegetable preparation and tasting.

At the Boys and Girls Club in Buhl, children and staff utilized empty school ground to build raised beds and set out flowerpots and feeders for pollinators. Staff used gardening to connect zoology with plant science. The children were excited to see hummingbirds.

The Hunger Coalition in Hailey serves children through school, afterschool and summer programs. Out of School, Into the Garden allowed the coalition to improve their greenhouse and purchase kid-friendly tools and seeds. Children also harvested vegetables to take home.

Idaho BaseCamp in Bellevue focuses on cultivating youth leaders with a connection to nature. Through their gardening program, children harvested greens from the greenhouse, designed new gardens, and planted and harvested produce at day camp and overnight camp sessions.

Immanuel Lutheran School in Twin Falls started with an indoor garden from seeds. “We grew basil and tried basil and tomatoes together. The general consensus: it’s a delicious herb.” The children planted cucumber,

pumpkin and tomato starts in specially designed raised, portable beds on the playground.

Ketchum Recreation Department enhanced their Watch Me Grow Garden. They updated raised beds, trellis systems and purchased a composter. Children in two summer sessions planted, grew and harvested 15 different vegetables or fruits.

Lil’ Ones Day School in Burley used a small space to grow 10 different vegetables or berries. The director expressed “many of the kids don’t even know what a garden is!” Through the gardening program, however, children learned to plant seeds of their choice, which they then tended to, harvested and tasted for a snack.

Daycare Solutions in Twin Falls removed almost all of the grass on their property to grow food with the children in their center. Grant funds covered trellising, season extension, seeds and rabbit fencing.

Lincoln County Youth Center’s Garden in Richfield started with bare ground but with Out of School, Into the Garden funded kid-friendly supplies. With their mentor, children learned about plant science and grew a variety of produce, flowers, herbs and fruit.

The Wood River YMCA enhanced their gardening program with a fairy garden, small-planted pots with moveable objects that inspired children’s imaginations. They also added a hydroponic tower system in the front lobby. The director shared “Since they put the grow tower in the lobby, they’ve seen a lot of interest and questions about their garden and the youth gardening program.”

Overall, at least 1,392 total youth participated in Out of School, Into the Garden in spring and summer 2022, participating in science enrichment, physical activity and engaging in healthy habits. “Everything the kids tried for snack was grown in the garden!” reported staff from Day Care Solutions. Idaho BaseCamp in Bellevue shared, “when we take the kids into the greenhouse, they demolish the salad greens.”

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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