

Prelude

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Lynn Hyndman, The Constant Gardener

When it comes to battling childhood obesity and increasing nutritional awareness, Lynn Hyndman has proven she's more than willing to get her hands dirty. Five years ago, the retired science teacher from Dawes School in Evanston launched a project called the Garden of Eatin', a student-cultivated garden designed to change "attitudes about what constitutes good food."

From April to the end of the school year, Hyndman supervises Dawes' students from kindergarten through fifth grade as they plant and oversee cool-weather crops in 12 raised beds. They learn about quality soil and organic gardening before harvesting, cleaning and tasting their crops in late May or June.

"It's just two little mouthfuls," says Hyndman, "but the rule is everyone needs to taste, unless there are religious or allergy

restrictions. This garden puts them in touch with how their food grows and makes them more savvy consumers."

In August Hyndman hosts an annual celebration, with support from Slow Food Chicago, an international organization that champions locally grown foods. Eighty families participated last summer. "I'll make a dish like ratatouille from our garden plants, augmented with produce from the Evanston Farmers' Market. We sit at one long table and enjoy what the kids have planted."

Hyndman does all this on a volunteer basis. She's hoping that a recent federal "Wellness Mandate" will encourage other schools to create their own gardens, but funding is a problem.

"We really need a paid garden coordinator," she says. "But I'm just a crazy lady. I just love to do it!"

-Linda Gartz