



Volunteer Information Kit

Welcome to the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program. Thankyou for your interest in becoming a volunteer and sharing your time and enthusiasm.

This kit introduces you to the Program and aims to answer any questions you may have about us and your role as a volunteer with the Kitchen Garden Program.

Please take the time to read all the information in this kit.



Our aim

The aim of the Kitchen Garden Program is pleasurable food education for young children. The underlying belief is that by introducing this holistic approach we have a chance to positively influence children's food choices in ways that have not been tried before.

A Kitchen Garden is created to provide edible, aromatic and beautiful resources for a kitchen. The creation and care of a Kitchen Garden teaches children about the natural world, about its beauty and how to care for it, how best to use the resources we have, and an appreciation for how easy it is to bring joy and wellbeing into one's life through **growing, harvesting, preparing** and **sharing** fresh, seasonal food.

Our philosophy

- We stress pleasure, flavour and texture by encouraging talk and thinking that uses all of the senses.
- We do not describe food to children using the word 'healthy' as the main descriptor.
- We reinforce techniques over and over so that the children are actually able to cook simple dishes or plant seeds at home.
- Menus are planned around seasonal availability.
- We seek to expand the culinary horizons for children and present cultural differences as fascinating rather than strange.
- We seek to expand the children's vocabulary for describing flavours and textures and plant families and names.
- We use fresh ingredients at their peak – for example, herbs should not be past their season, beans should not be overgrown and tough.
- The cooking of raw fruit and vegetables should be timed with great care – we don't want to present children with food that is unpalatable.
- The garden crops underpin kitchen planning - lots of basil is likely to lead to a pesto-making session; lots of green tomatoes to chutney or pickles. Menu planning will take account of growing timelines.
- In other words, the Garden Specialist needs to understand about the ingredients of good cooking and the Kitchen Specialist needs to understand a bit about gardening.
- We come together around a table at the end of the cooking to share the meal.

It is up to the individual specialists to decide how to organise and present their classes. Above all the classes are to be enjoyable.

How the Kitchen Garden Program works

In the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program children across Years 3 to 6 spend a minimum of 40 minutes a week in an extensive vegetable garden which they have helped design, build and maintain on the school grounds according to organic gardening principles.

They also spend one and a half hours each week in a kitchen classroom preparing and sharing a wonderful variety of meals created from their produce.

Why have a Kitchen Garden Program?

Not all kids eat well. A disturbing number go to school each day without breakfast. Many others are overweight or obese. These symptoms of the busy world in which we live are likely to become habits of a lifetime for our children and lead to serious health issues in the future.

The good news is that kids are as responsive to positive food experiences and encouragement as they are to television advertising for snack foods.

1 in 4 Australian children are overweight or obese

This is the public health issue of the not-too-distant future – diabetes, heart disease, strokes, joint problems, dental decay, chronic constipation, depression – to name a few consequences of an unhealthy diet and lack of exercise. The fruit and vegetable intakes of Australian children and adolescents fall well below recommendations and have continued to decline in the past 10 years.

Overweight and obese children and adolescents face some of the same health conditions as adults, and may be particularly sensitive to the effects on their self-esteem and peer-group relationships.

At least as important as culinary deprivation is *cultural deprivation*. It crosses class, ethnic and income levels. ‘We may be witnessing the first generation in history that has not been required to participate in that primal rite of socialisation, the family meal’.

The importance and power of the shared table

In many cultures, eating together around a table is the centre of family life. It is the meeting place, where thoughts are shared, ideas challenged, news is exchanged and where the participants leave the table restored in many ways. They have been valued; they have been part of a supportive group; they have possibly heard something new and different, and over the years they will get to taste lots of different things. In the Kitchen Garden Program, equal importance is given to time around the table sharing the meal that has been prepared from produce grown in the garden.

Making a difference

We believe we can make a difference. We believe that introducing children to good food as early as possible is the best way to grow a food lover for life, ideally at home from birth until the child leaves home to live independently. Realistically this does not happen for a great number of children. By setting good examples and engaging the children at a primary school level we can provide them with wonderful, nutritious food experiences that form the basis for good life-long eating habits. When we lead by example and make healthy food fun, kids eat well and live well.

Volunteers are vital

The Kitchen Garden Program in schools relies on many people to work to its full potential, and volunteers are vital to its success. Participating schools welcome your time, passion and enthusiasm in kitchen classes, garden classes, or participating in working bees or special events.

Kitchen and garden classes

Under the direction of the kitchen or garden specialist, volunteers facilitate hands-on learning for every child through supervising small groups of students (4-5) to undertake garden activities in weekly garden classes or supervising small groups (4-5) as they prepare a range of dishes as part of a planned menu in weekly kitchen classes. The volunteers then join the children to eat the meal.

Volunteering in the garden

Produce that is grown in the garden is harvested, then prepared and shared by the students in their kitchen class. Many different activities take place and may include planting, pruning, composting, seed saving, mulching, harvesting and watering.

Garden class format

A garden class is generally 45 minutes long. At both the beginning and the end of the class, students gather together to learn about the day's tasks and to then discuss what they have learned. Students undertake the various garden activities in small groups of 4 – 5, each working alongside a volunteer.

It is ideal if volunteers can arrive in the garden 15 minutes before the class commences to discuss the class plan for the lesson.

Volunteering in the kitchen

As Stephanie Alexander says, above all cooking should be fun and the food delicious.

Kitchen class format

Each kitchen class is one and half hours long. The first 10 minutes are spent washing hands, putting on aprons, then sitting quietly at the tables to hear about the menu for the day and to discuss the ingredients and techniques that the class will use.

Each class is divided into groups comprising 4 – 5 students and is allocated a work-station (bench, sink, stove and oven), with each group working alongside a volunteer.

Each week, the menu comprises seasonal vegetable and salad dishes, a main component and accompaniments eg bread and occasionally dessert. Each group of students prepares a different part of the meal, using one copy of the recipe between them. Given the focus on creating real-life learning, students use adult-sized utensils, including knives to prepare dishes. All students are taught how to use all the equipment properly and safely.

Ideally there is one volunteer per work station to help students read through the recipe, measure ingredients, prepare the dish and distribute it amongst the platters for the shared meal time. When all parts of the menu are ready, everyone sits as a group to share the meal together – children, volunteers and teacher.

Group discussion at the table and friendly assistance with passing of plates and water jugs is encouraged. Shouting across the room and getting up from the table is not. The focus is on sharing and enjoyment. At the end of the meal, each group is responsible for clearing and cleaning the table and washing their dishes.

Working bees and special events

Whilst all schools rely on volunteers in the kitchen and garden classes, there are often one-off volunteering opportunities such as working bees to complete a particular project.

Many schools are just beginning to establish the Kitchen Garden Program and therefore need to build their infrastructure ie gardens and kitchens, before they can start to deliver classes.

Schools often hold working bees that require a team of volunteers who can offer a day or a few hours to complete a project. The projects often need people who are willing and able to do some hard physical work, for example, building garden beds and compost bays.

Renovating kitchens and installing bench tops may need people with an array of skills, however enthusiasm and perspiration will usually win the day.

Schools also hold special events from time-to-time, for example fundraising days or community meetings where volunteers may be required.

Your commitment

Reliability and continuity

It is highly desirable that volunteers commit to the same class each week for at least one term. This allows your relationship with the children to develop, builds familiarity and ease and also helps with planning.

Volunteers are often welcome to stay for the whole day, or for just one class. It is universal practice for schools to require all volunteers to have a current Working with Children check.

Firm and kind instruction

Your role is one of facilitator, rather than a leader who imposes direction. Be a good model. Everyone is there to learn and have fun. Volunteers are not expected to be the disciplinarians, so seek teacher intervention if the firm and kind approach does not seem to be working!

Encourage everyone in the group to participate and share the load. It is important that you don't do the work, but instead demonstrate and work with the children. Show them rather than tell them. Encourage students to use their senses to touch, taste, smell, hear and see things around them.

Safety

Practice safe bending and equipment use and encourage the children to do the same.

Cleanliness

Making a mess and getting dirty does not really matter, however cleaning up at the end of the class does - which often involves being firm with the students to ensure this is done properly.

Confidentiality

Volunteers have a trusted relationship with the students, please respect this.

Accepting direction

The kitchen and garden teachers run the lessons. Your role is to assist them in this

Philosophy & values

Volunteers should act according to the philosophy and the values of the Kitchen Garden Program

What you can expect from your involvement

Recognition

We know that the success of the Program lies in the continual support from volunteers and schools value their volunteers highly.

Support from the Kitchen and Garden Specialists

At the beginning of every session an outline of the lesson is given to volunteers and then again to the class when it begins. The Specialist and the classroom teacher are present for each lesson, as well as other fabulous volunteers.

Learning new skills

You may find that in the process of participating in classes or assisting in working bees, you develop new skills and acquire knowledge too. We are all continually learning and growing.

A thoroughly rewarding experience, in a healthy, safe and friendly working environment, with other people wanting to participate in the joy of growing, harvesting, preparing and sharing fresh, delicious food.

Adequate insurance coverage for the usual activities of the Kitchen Garden Program.

Visit our website

Visit www.kitchengardenfoundation.org.au to find out more about the Program and the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation.