



## Welcome Educators!

Extension Curricula EC-4

The Growing Healthy Habits Curriculum was developed by the University of Maryland Extension, Food Supplement Nutrition Education Program (FSNE) for integrating nutrition through gardening in Maryland elementary classrooms, grades K-5. This curriculum uses gardening as a tool for encouraging students to consume more fruits and vegetables and whole grains, and increase physically activity. Growing Healthy Habits provides engaging and exciting nutrition and gardening lessons that reinforce the Maryland Common Core, as well as Environmental Literacy Standards and STEM.

Growing Healthy Habits addresses the following key behavioral outcomes:

- Make half your plate fruits and vegetables, make your grains whole grains, and switch to fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products.
- Increase physical activity and reduce time spent in sedentary behaviors as part of a healthy lifestyle.
- Maintain appropriate calorie balance during each stage of life – childhood, adolescence, adulthood, pregnancy and breastfeeding, and older age.

While a healthy diet includes eating a variety of foods from all food groups, fruits and vegetables tend to be the most under-consumed food groups among low-income individuals (Lin 2005). There is a growing body of literature supporting gardening as an effective means for increasing fruit and vegetable consumption in young people (Heim et al2009; Robinson-O'Brien, Story, & Heim 2009; McAleese & Rankin 2007). Integrating gardening education into schools or other youth education sites is only practical if the gardening program also helps meet the broad educational goals of the site.

Growing Healthy Habits provides an easy-to-use set of lesson plans that allow educators to provide learning experiences that complement their existing curriculum or programming goals, using vegetable gardening for demonstration of the concepts of the lessons. Each of the nine lesson units includes an introductory lesson, two follow-up lessons and a reflective journal lesson. A food tasting using fresh, seasonal ingredients is integrated into each unit to enhance the learning experience. While this curriculum teaches important lessons on gardening and nutrition, it is not meant to be a comprehensive experience for developing gardening skills among your students. The Appendix provides information for accessing resources for developing and maintaining a garden.

We hope that the Growing Healthy Habits curriculum helps you establish a strong nutrition education through gardening foundation for your program. Thank you for your dedication to providing children the tools they need to develop into healthy and successful adults.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Heather C. Buritsch".

Heather C. Buritsch

**References:**

Lin, B. 2005. Nutrition and Healthy Characteristics of Low-Income Populations: Healthy Eating Index. AIB-796-1, USDA, Economic Research Service.

Heim, S., Stang, J., & Ireland, M. 2009. A Garden Pilot Project Enhances Fruit and Vegetable Consumption among Children. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 109: 1220-1226.

McAleese, J. & Rankin, L. 2007. Garden-Based Nutrition Education Affects Fruit and Vegetable Consumption in Sixth-Grade Adolescents. *Journal of the American Dietetics Association* 107: 662-665.

Robinson-O'Brien, R. Story, M. & Heim, S. 2009. Impact of Garden-Based Youth Nutrition Intervention Programs: A Review. *Journal of the American Dietetics Association* 109: 273-280.

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