



# 'Tried and True' Farm to Early Childhood Lessons



Presented by Maggie Rubick, Mentor Teacher at Northshire Day School

Fall 2023

# The “Recipe”



## Agenda

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My Farm to School story

2

The story of Farm to Early  
Childhood at Northshire Day  
School

3

‘Tried and True’ favorites

4

Current happenings in our Early  
Childhood classrooms.

5

Ideas, Tips & Tricks for FTEC integration



# My Farm to School Story



The Discovery Garden at Brooklyn Botanic Garden, ca. 2008



The seeds began to sprout in Brooklyn...

# It grew in the pre-k classroom

Date: April 2016  
Experience: pre-k, gardening, literacy, health and nutrition, math and science, music, and  
motor development, social skills (cooperation and collaboration)  
Group Size: whole class, small group (3-4 children)  
Location/Setting: Pre-K classroom and school garden  
Time: morning circle and playground time (flexible, can be done in afternoon)

**Description:** A teacher will read *The Carrot Seed* to the whole group as part of morning circle and describe the activity planned for later. Children will examine the carrot seeds and discuss at circle. Children may make and record predictions for how long it will take the carrots to grow. During playground time, a teacher will facilitate small group planting in school garden. In coming weeks/months, a teacher will help children to observe the plants as they grow.

**Rationale:** Gardening activities support children's physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development. Involving children in planting the school garden helps make the garden a more meaningful place and instills curatorial interest. Carrots are the Harvest of the Month product for April and they are also an excellent plant to grow with children (they make *Green Mountain Farm to School's* list of "Top Ten Plants to Grow With Kids").

## Objectives

### TSGold Learning Objectives:

#### Social/Emotional

- 1. Regulates own emotions and behaviors
- 3. Participates cooperatively and constructively in group situations

#### Physical

- 4. Demonstrates traveling skills
- 6. Demonstrates gross-motor manipulative skills
- 7a. Uses fingers and hands

#### Language

- 8. Listens to and understands increasingly complex language
- 9. Uses language to express thoughts and needs
- 10. Uses appropriate conversational and other communication skills

#### Cognitive

- 11. Demonstrates positive approaches to learning
- 12. Remembers and connects experiences
- 13. Uses classification skills

#### Literacy

- 15. Comprehends and responds to books and other texts

#### Mathematics

- 20. Explores and describes spatial relationships and shapes
- 21. Compares and measures
- 22. Demonstrates knowledge of patterns

#### Science and Technology

- 24. Demonstrates knowledge of the characteristics of living things
- 25. Demonstrates knowledge of the physical properties of objects and materials
- 26. Demonstrates knowledge of Earth's environment
- 27. Uses tools and other technology to perform tasks

#### Social Studies

- 30. Shows basic understanding of people and how they live
- 31. Explores change related to familiar people or places



Connecting school gardens and community to pre-k curriculum.

# Northshire Day School's Farm to Early Childhood Story

We  
started  
small...

...beginning with a shared vision:



an educator



an administrator



the chef

# First Steps: Focusing on Curriculum and Local Food Procurement



Without sufficient **resources** (time, money, energy, support), and facing many **challenges** (staffing crisis, COVID, teacher burnout) our efforts stagnated.



Then, we found  
a way to move  
forward, and  
the timing was  
right.



Our broader context:  
Farm to School  
becomes Farm to  
School and Early  
Childhood !



Then three people  
became an entire  
committee!



Every good story contains a point of  
challenge or conflict.

We can choose to see challenges as opportunities.



# Next Steps: Growing Connections between Classroom, Kitchen, and Community



# Our Current Focus: Sustainability

The 'big  
picture': FTEC  
occurs within  
and across  
many layers  
of context



# Farm to Early Childhood: Focus on Classroom & Curriculum



# “Tried and True” Favorite FTEC Experiences

## Garden planning and Soil Preparation Experiences

- Garden mapping and measuring
- **Brainstorming:** What should we grow?
- **Classifying:** fruits vs. vegetables vs. flowers
- **Soil testing** experiments with simple in-home kits
- **Soil preparation:** tilling and removing rocks/weeds; building raised rows; amending soil (add compost)

# Garden mapping & planning



# “Tried and True” Favorite FTEC Experiences

## Seed-sowing and germination activities

- Indoor **seed-starting** - so many ways to do this!
- **Sowing seeds** in the garden / outside
- **Make seed tape** - fine-motor activity
- **Seed sorting** - large seeds like pumpkins and peas work well, and adding tools like tweezers can promote fine-motor development
- **Seedling measurement** and growth tracking (data collection / graphing)

# Seed-starting experiences



# “Tried and True” Favorite FTEC Experiences

## Harvesting-related experiences

- **Carrots** are a favorite crop for their many uses at harvest time! Also easy to grow and rewarding: Cherry tomatoes, pole beans and peas, kale, perennial herbs (mint, chives).
- **Quick-growing crops** (like radishes) provide a more immediate seed-to-plate experience.
- **Potatoes** are also fun for young children to harvest and can be used in a wide variety of ways.
- **Sorting, measuring and quantifying** are involved in harvesting experiences.

# Carrot harvest activities



scrubbing, sorting and measuring, tasting and data collection!

# “Tried and True” Favorite FTEC Experiences

## **Cooking and food preparation-related activities:**

- **Simple snack-making experiences** can be used as opportunities to teach/assess a wide range of learning objectives (no cooking required).
- **Taste Tests** can be modified for any age group, and can be implemented in a variety of ways to meet different objectives.
- **Baking projects** are also a favorite and can promote many social-emotional skills (i.e. sharing and turn-taking, collaboration, waiting/delaying gratification).

# Cooking experiences





# “Tried and True” Favorite FTEC Experiences

## **Garden Observation and Mindfulness Experiences**

- **Observing and recording** activities can be meaningful learning experiences that provide a range of developmental opportunities in addition to promoting math, literacy, and science concepts.
- **Notice and Wonder:** Engage children in thinking routines while in the garden (or classroom) (i.e., ‘see, think, wonder’).
- **Mindfulness moments** can happen in the garden! Try the “Name 5” strategy to engage younger children in a developmentally appropriate mindfulness experience.

# FTEC Across Classrooms: Recent Happenings at NDS



# Infants and Toddlers



A study of fruits and vegetables!

# Preschool & Pre-K

Plants, pumpkins, and family-focused experiences!

Week of: **October 9**

## To Do

- work on About Us book

## Curriculum

- Second round of classroom
- Plants:
  - art project
  - sensory bin
  - discuss characteristic & jobs of plants

## VELS

- SE.1.1.YP.4** Adapt behavior to fit different
- SE.2.1.YP.1** ID personal preferences & ch
- AL.1.1.YP.3** Build knowledge through play
- LI.1.1.YP.7** Name some letters of the alph
- MA.3.1.YP.1** Sort objects by one attribute
- SC.2.1.YP.1** ID living from non-living thing
- SS.2.1.YP.5** Take

## Sing

Plant songs

## Move

Plant yoga

## Create

Art for bulletin boards

## Discuss

Types of plants

## Observe

Notice plants in our space

## Read

Plant books

## Play

Garden sensory bin



Credits: Aspen & Maple Classrooms

# Program-Wide Events



## Día de trabajo en el jardín

PATROCINADO POR EL COMITÉ DE FARM TO SCHOOL

¡Únete a nosotros para algunos trabajos de jardinería!

Tendremos trabajos para personas de todas las capacidades, y un bocadillo nutritivo.

Por favor, trae sus herramientas de jardín y planea trabajar con su familia.

EL SÁBADO, 3 DE JUNIO, 2023  
DE 10 A.M. A 12 P.M.



# Making Connections: Kitchen, Families, & Community



**NDS** Northshire Day School  
Family Wellness Fair  
Saturday, September 30  
10 am - noon  
This event is free  
and open to the community!



Northshire Day School's  
**Family  
Cookbook**  
September 2023

Cook meals  
“just like Tammy  
makes”

# Tips & Tricks

## Bring Nature Inside

- **Natural objects** like pinecones, sticks, or seedpods, can be used for loose parts play, for open-ended art-making, or as interest materials in science or sensory play areas.
- Set-up a **simple indoor grow station** - a relatively low-cost way to help children engage in food-growing experiences without leaving the classroom. Micro-greens and some herbs can be easy and rewarding to grow indoors.



# Tips & Tricks

## Fruits and vegetables as learning materials

- **Fruits and vegetables** can be wonderful materials to use in scientific investigations or as inspiration for creative play and art-making.
- Children can engage in observing and documenting; dissecting and removing seeds; counting, sorting, and measuring; classifying/sorting; drawing, writing, and graphing; and all-five-senses exploration.

*A caution!*

Using food for play and exploration can be controversial, as there are complex cultural implications and ethical considerations (i.e., food waste, culturally-significant foods, food insecurity).

**Be thoughtful of what you are modeling when using food materials for non-consumptive purposes in the classroom.**



# Tips & Tricks

## Model Sustainability

- We do this in a few small but important ways and are still growing these practices:
  - Program-wide **composting**
  - Encouraging **reusable** water bottles
  - Program-wide and classroom-level **recycling**
  - Promoting **environmental stewardship** concepts like **water conservation** (i.e., turning water off while scrubbing hands or brushing teeth; using rain barrels)
  - Prioritizing **local foods** in our school meal program.
  - Growing **native plants** in our school gardens.



# Tips & Tricks

## Take Advantage of Resources!

- Grant funding, technical assistance, and training are available through the VAAFMM grant program.
- The VT Farm to School & Early Childhood Network provides resources and connection-making opportunities.
- Many educators with expertise live and work in Vermont.
- Professional development and educational opportunities are regularly available.





# Questions, comments, and connections...?

