

## Holden School Gardeners Offer Peek at Their Efforts

The photos below offer a glimpse of what the students at Holden Elementary School are doing with their vegetable garden project. Clockwise from left: A student holds a sign for the Holden Garden Project; student shows off a oversize radish; students study their garden handiwork.



## Holden Garden Update: We're *Really* Cookin' Now!

by Kelly Ferry

*Rose Simmons had arranged for Kelly Ferry to enlist the Kent Recreation Center youngsters in helping maintain the Holden Garden project for the summer months. Rose and Kelly are both members of the Holden Gardeners. Click [here](#) for an explanation of how the group got started. The report below was sent to KEC after Ferry spent a day with the Recreation Center children talking about the vegetables in the garden, engaging the children in picking the crops,*

*helping the children share in cooking the harvest in the Recreation Center kitchen and then registering the children's reaction to eating the vegetables. We thought these children's experiences might be of interest to our readers.*

Wow! The garden is HUGE. The plants are looking so healthy and vibrant, but they also need to be picked. We started at the garden at 9:30 a.m., and the children showed us everything they had noticed over the week. The pole beans were ready for a light harvest. I explained to the children that beans need to be picked regularly once they produce beans in order to stimulate more flower growth and more beans. If the beans are too old on the vine, it tells the plant that it's time to go to sleep and stop making beans. The children were quite intrigued that the green beans (Fortex French Bean variety) are struggling under Japanese Beetle attacks, while the purple beans aren't being touched.

Karl Liske brought a beetle trap a couple of weeks ago, and the children have loved emptying it every day. The bag, however, got quite stinky so, rather than buying more bags, Simmons worked with the children to make a bag using a regular plastic bag, tape and string. They did a fantastic job of modeling it after the original bag shape, and it's working just fine. Excellent work! I am so impressed with how invested the children at the Recreation Center have become in this project. The okra has flowers and some big purple okra already. The children wondered if the flowers become the okra, and I showed them where the pod is just below the petals.

One radish remains in the garden, and it has a massive, woody root structure that curls across the garden, off the bed and into the path around the garden. We talked about how root plants make more seed and decided to leave the radish to see what happens. Perhaps we will get to collect seeds to plant next spring!

The children tasted the lettuce again, and just about everybody spit it out—myself included. It looks beautiful still, but the heat is making it full of bitter milk. We should decide about pulling that out and maybe reseeding more lettuce or some other fall crop.

The children have shown lots of enthusiasm about the cherry tomatoes, some of which are turning gold. So on to the best part . . .

The children harvested a couple pounds of chard and kale, plus they gave the basil and oregano a much-needed haircut. It had rained overnight, so we didn't have to water the garden.

After the harvest was brought back to the Recreation Center, the next group of children came into the kitchen and WOW. What an enthusiastic bunch. We set up two electric skillets on a rolling cart, then all gathered around the big stainless worktable. They took turns with just about everything in the cooking process, using real knives and learning how to hold their thumbs under their hand while cutting. Some of the children said they had never cooked before. None of them had eaten kale or chard. Most of them had never heard of it until the garden was planted. The children learned how to cut an onion (tough with small hands on a large Vidalia onion), peel and cut garlic into fine mince, looked over all the greens for bugs (found a patch of eggs on the back of one chard leaf), picked basil leaves and oregano leaves off the stems, and chopped all of the greens.

The children helped with sautéing the onion and garlic in olive oil (making sure it didn't burn to the bottom of the pan), added the greens and herbs, and took turns stirring until the ingredients were bright and tender. Meanwhile, another group took turns with two hand-crank cheese graters to shred a big wedge of Parmesan cheese.

I had cooked two pounds of penne pasta at home and coated it with extra virgin oil, so we added the greens and cheese to that in a giant mixing bowl. Again, they all took turns mixing it to make sure all of the ingredients were well distributed. Then it was time to eat! Every child but one filled up his or her bowl at least twice. Even some of the kids who had said they would only eat the noodles said the kale and chard were delicious. Some said they would ask their families to plant those two vegetables in their gardens next year so they could have the dish at home. One young man popped back into the kitchen as I was cleaning up to announce that the dish "rates a 10!"

*Ferry has provided the recipe for those who would like to try it this summer! She says that sometimes she adds cannellini beans for protein. Click [here](#) for the recipe for Kelly's Pasta with Greens & Parmesan.*