About the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program
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 and help to encourage healthy eating habits.

A Kitchen Garden is a garden created to provide edible, aromatic and beautiful resources for a kitchen. The creation and care of a Kitchen Garden teaches us about the natural world, about its beauty and how to care for it, how best to use the resources we have and develop an appreciation of the wide range of possibilities for both the cook and the gardener. There are four major components to the program: Growing, Harvesting, Preparing, Sharing.

The Program works best when the two specialist areas, the kitchen and the garden, work in partnership with each other, so that these elements form a harmonious cycle.

How the program works
In the 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. The program employs two part-time specialist staff; a gardener and a cook, to run these sessions.

There are two special factors about the Kitchen Garden Program. The first is the intrinsic link between the garden, the kitchen and the table. The emphasis is on learning about food and about eating it. No part of the Program can exist without the other. The second is the program is embedded in the curriculum. It is a part of the school's program for four years of a child's life.

Benefits of the program
- Life-long skills in the kitchen and garden
- Introduction to and appreciation of fresh seasonal food
- Socialisation through team work, sharing a meal and working with volunteers
- Practical understanding of environmental sustainability
- Understanding the link between good food choices and optimum health
- Active, hands-on activity and exercise
For children

* New skills in the kitchen and garden equip them to lead lives that are not dependent on processed foods
* Models a new way to connect with parents/family in discussing what happens in the Kitchen Garden Program and applying what is learnt (growing things, cooking things) at home
* Develops understanding of time needed for important things to happen e.g. grow food to harvest, bread dough to rise
* Introduces new foods, new flavours, new textures
* Appreciation of fresh seasonal food
* Students learn and record specific vocabulary to describe some of the textures, tastes and sights that they experience
* Students record their experiences through class diaries
* Students develop confidence and self esteem
* Encourages physical activity
* Develops co-operative behaviour as all work is done as part of a small group
* Develops social skills at the table e.g. sharing, conversation
* Develops deeper understandings and tolerance of cultural difference by exposure to other culinary traditions
* Develops strong relationships with adults other than class teacher or parent e.g. volunteers
* Develops practical understanding of environmental issues such as soil health, water management, seed-saving, organic pest control and the importance of plant diversity
* Understanding the link between good food choices & optimum health
* Develops better understanding of the relationship between the garden and the table

For schools

* Ability to achieve learning outcomes through an innovative, hands-on approach
* Creates excitement within the school community
* Opportunity to build internal and external community networks and connections during construction phase and ongoing volunteering
* Builds students’, families’ and local communities’ pride in their school which has flow on effects such as increased enrolments, less vandalism
* Facility which can also be used for community purposes, before and after school care groups, special occasion celebrations, and hired for income
* Be recognised as a valuable contributor to educational innovation

Source: www.kitchengardenfoundation.org.au
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