

Overview:

The Child Nutrition Department is committed to reinforcing the connection between health and learning. We are working closely with our grant schools to create sustainable gardens that can be used for years to come.

**A Note from Larry Thompson,
Garden Coordinator**

“I have had the recent pleasure of visiting each of our school gardens and have even helped the students plant onions and transplants. They really enjoy being out in the garden, no matter the weather condition. Thanks again to the students and teachers who are working very hard to make their school garden a success this year.”

**this issue**Potatoes for February **P.1**Seeds & Composting **P.2**Weeds & Pests **P.3****February Report**

We are over half-way through February with typical North Texas weather: cold then warm, rainy then dry. The teasing weather puts any gardener on high alert and we begin to get excited.

Time to Get Planting!

It is time to plant your seed potatoes! Planting is easy and they produce a very good harvest. The rule of thumb is that Valentine’s Day is the official Potato Planting Day. Of course, be mindful of the weather in North Texas—you may need to cover the plant with mulch or freeze cloth if temperatures drop. The longer we wait to the plant the spuds, the longer it takes for them to mature and be ready for harvest before the end of the school year.

We recommend the school gardens plant potatoes in a raised bed by themselves or in a container. For example, Denton Creek Elementary has used a laundry basket as their container. They line the basket with newspaper, then add the soil and potatoes. Quick and easy with excellent results!

Two Ways to Plant the Potatoes:

1. Plant the whole potato, eyes up, 4” deep, spacing them 8”-12” apart. The eyes produce the root which produce the tuber (potato). Once the green leaves break the surface of the soil, cover with mulch or more soil, do this 2x.
2. To get more out of a single seed potato, cut the seed potato into sections, leaving a potato eye to produce the tubular. This will increase the number of potatoes planted. Follow the same instructions for depth & space as you would if you were planting a whole potato.
 - Remember: allow the cut potato to scab over for a few days before planting (it will have a leathery feel). Fresh cut potatoes will be attacked by insects and succumb easier to weather conditions.



February

- Vegetable transplants
- Packaged Seeds
- Herbs

Future Utilization:

The Child Nutrition's Farm Fresh Friday for May will feature Garden-Grown potatoes! Our cafeterias will utilize every bit of our potato harvest to provide the students with an interactive taste-test experience!

Special Thanks:

Many thanks to the Coppell Community Garden for partnering with Coppell ISD. They have provided over 2,000 transplants of various varieties, 50 lbs. of potatoes and over 1,000 onions. Bert Tindal with the Community Garden Greenhouse worked early in the year to ensure the school gardens had healthy transplants for the students and teachers to plant.



No occupation is so delightful to me as the culture of the earth, and no culture comparable to that of the garden.

Thomas Jefferson

What else can we start planting?

Seeds:

We recently provided seeds for Radishes, Carrots, Spinach, Swiss Chard, Lettuce, and Kale all these varieties can be planted in the garden now. We also have a few Turnip & Beet seed packets. If you are interested, let Larry know!

Planting with Cover Crops:

Several schools took advantage of the cover crop seeds that were provided. When planting transplants, make room in the bed for the transplant, but leave the remaining cover crop in place. To make extra room, cut the green leaf of the cover crop flush with the ground, leaving the root base. Do not remove the cover crop—the root system provides soil aeration and the root nodules provide much needed nitrogen in the soil.

Composting:

Composting can be accomplished year-round and is especially important for the schools to start now in order to have compost/mulch ready at the end of the school year. The materials can be applied to the beds before the students break for summer, getting the beds ready for when they return. Larry has been holding basic compost training for the school garden clubs. If you are interested in having him come to your school for hands-on training and discussion about compostable materials and how to utilize the new compost bins, please do not hesitate to contact him for more details!



Cover Crop

Pest & Weed Control

Spring is coming which means weeds and both good and bad insects will start visiting our gardens. Here is just one of the “bad” pests we’ve already started to see in our school gardens and how to get rid of them!

Colorado Potato Beetle:

With potatoes come the dreaded Colorado Potato Beetle. Neem Oil is an organic approach to the Colorado Potato Beetle. Larry uses Dr. Bronner Soap.

Larry’s DO’s and DON’T’s:

DO

- Plant potatoes in a container, grow bag or livestock feed bucket. This method will free up raised bed space and remove the potential breeding ground for the larva in the raised beds.

DON’T

- Grow potatoes in the raised bed with other crops. If you do, you may be inviting pests into your soil that could still be there well after you harvest which could potentially affect future crops.

DO

- Dump the soil in the container after harvest away from any beds. This will remove any eggs or larva that are in the soil. The following year, start over with reestablished bed soil in the container. This will not eliminate the beetle but will reduce the ill effects significantly.

Weed Killer Recipe:

With much needed and appreciated rain, comes unwanted weeds in our surrounding garden area. Here is an easy recipe that Larry uses:

3. Organic Vinegar Weed Killer:

- One Quart spray bottle
- Fill 75% water-25% with 20% strength vinegar-1 tablespoon of liquid dishwashing soap. Works best in dry and warm >65 degrees conditions. Acts within 24-48 hours, may need second application if larger weeds exist.
 - The soap acts as a sticking agent to the leaves.
 - I do not add salt, but some gardeners add this ingredient.

CAUTION: This recipe is nonselective; it will kill any and every plant it encounters. Do not spray on windy day and be careful of overspray in the garden.



This is a juvenile Colorado Potato Beetle. It has spots along its sides.



This is an adult Potato Beetle. It has a red-orange head and stripes.

Grant Goals:

The goal of the grant is to help our learners connect with the “3E’s of Healthy Living— Education, Exercise and Eating Right.” Funds are being utilized to enhance our school gardens by purchasing equipment, seeds, educational materials and more.

Contacts:

[Larry Thompson](#)

Quick Links:

[CISD Garden Page](#)

[CISD Nutrition Page](#)

[SHAC Page](#)

[TDA X3E Grant](#)

[Coppell Community Garden](#)

