

Our Organic Garden



Nature's hope is for future generations not to have to be taught how to live sustainably, but that will live that way out of a deep connection with Earth and knowledge about the perils of severing that connection.

John Burroughs, the American naturalist and essayist cautioned that "Knowledge without love will not stick. But if love comes first, knowledge is sure to follow." A child's emotional and affective values of nature develop earlier than her abstract, logical and rational perspectives. At the Novato Charter School, rather than just imparting knowledge and responsibility to students before they have been allowed to develop a loving relationship with the earth, we provide opportunities for them to have early, frequent and positive encounters with nature that will result in the development of a responsible environmental ethic.

Our Organic Garden provides those opportunities.

Everyday Novato Charter School students spend class and free time in our garden. Kindergartners begin each day with a walk through the garden, tasting the seasonal produce, singing songs, and visiting with the chickens. The Third Graders are responsible for collecting each classroom's compost, so they visit the large compost area each day. Over the years each student spends hours and hours in our garden, sketching, observing wildlife, feeding worms, amending beds, and harvesting produce.



Through cultivation, observation, and exploration, students become stewards with a strong awareness of nutrition and seasonal cycles. As they



move through the grades, Gardening is taught in conjunction with Mathematics, Science-as-Inquiry, Arts, and Social Studies. By the time students reach Middle School, their foundation in our garden allows them to move into complex projects such as rain catchment, landscape design, soil science, ecosystem restoration and the business math of plant sales.

Every grade—including Kindergarten—is responsible for sowing, caring, and harvesting a few beds in the garden. The gathered produce is used to prepare meals to be shared in the outdoor classroom or sold at our seasonal Farmer's Stand.



The Artful Integration of Science and Gardening in Kindergarten—by Michael Rohner

“Science does not know its debt to imagination.”

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Teaching science at the Novato Charter School is not as much about what our children learn as it is how we inspire and incite them to inquire, imagine, and learn. Inquiry is the essence of a scientific mind and the cornerstone of our Science Program. Our Science Program in Kindergarten is carefully developed to strike a balance between the knowledge and magic of a subject, while placing subject matter as close to the natural phenomena as possible. Our garden is the perfect laboratory for these budding scientists.

The Ladybug Project seeks to achieve the following enduring outcomes in students:

- Interest, curiosity, connection and respect for natural environment
- Knowledge about creatures in our garden (characteristics, habitat, behavior)
- Communicating knowledge, discoveries, insights
- Ability to use mind as a tool
- Respect for small living creatures
- Investigation inspires questions



We begin by having Kindergarteners plant fava bean seeds in the fall, using all their senses to interact with nature.



Learning that aphids love fava bean plants, and Lady Bugs love aphids, the children begin to make scientific connections.

Once the fava bean plants are

fully grown, the children investigate outdoors, finding ladybug eggs and larvae.

Learning through discovery and investigation is one of the BIG IDEAS in the K-2 Science-as-Inquiry program.



What the Garden Means to Students

“The garden is a unique way to let everyone experience the joy of actually being near all the flowers you learned about rather than learning about them in a book.”

“I have been here since I was a kid, and it has always been such a magical place. I mean, when you’re a little kid, and the garden seems so magical, you can believe there are fairies there. I love that the most. As I grew older, I learned that, while there were no fairies, there were many more magical things, such as bugs and the magical way plants grow.”

“The place in the garden that I love most is the compost. Although it absolutely stinks, I love seeing nature turn useless banana peels or uneaten apples into healthy and rich soil.”

“To me, our school garden is a place where I can be myself and at the same time give back to our planet. It’s also a place that allows me to see eye-to-eye with nature really showing me how important it is for our survival. I think everybody should “get their hands dirty” and go work in a garden or at a farm so we can become more educated about where and how our food gets to our tables.”