

Welcome to Our New School Gardens! Here's our story...

BMU teachers have talked about the advantages of having a school garden for a long time. After several years of planning, we gathered enough interested people together from the school and community to build one on July 11, 2016.

Through the generosity of our community, we built the garden and grew our first crop for free. The school's only expenses related to the garden, so far, have been for additional water usage to irrigate the crops and some paper to make signs.

The garden currently has 10 raised beds constructed of rough pine lumber (donated by The Wooden House Company). Each bed is 4'W x 10'L x 1.5' H. This gives us 400 square feet of growing space!

Each bed is filled with local topsoil (also donated by The Wooden House Company) and amended with compost (purchased with a gift certificate donated by Walmart) and with ProGro organic fertilizer (donated by Linda Ide).

The beds are high and narrow enough to make it easy for children to reach easily into the center. They are spaced four feet apart to allow wheel chair access.

Although we started planting late (July 11) we harvested more than six kinds of tomatoes, carrots, pumpkins, sunflowers, chives, strawberries, arugula, three kinds of lettuce, two kinds of cabbage, potatoes, sage, rosemary, thyme, lemon balm, celery, radishes, and hot and sweet peppers (the plants were donated by North Haverhill Agway, Riverside Grange in West Topsham, and gardener Peter Sinclair of Ryegate).

Why do we need a school garden?

Children learn many things from a garden:

Natural science -- Gardens immerse us in the cycles of the year, and the way the earth's tilt affects the amount of sunlight that strikes our latitude. It teaches how plants grow, soil structure and biology, and the role insects play in plant fertilization, among many other things.

Responsibility – Watering, weeding, fertilizing, harvesting and cleaning up the garden require understanding and attention to the needs of the plants and soil.

New skills – Different plants require different nutrients, soil types, and water regimens. They also require different preparation and cooking methods. The acquiring of these skills and knowledge build a child's confidence and ability to take on new challenges.

New tastes – A garden can introduce children to new vegetable and fruit flavors, textures, smells, and experiences. A carrot that you pull out of the soil will always taste and smell better than one you shake out from a can. Working with other kids and watching your plants grow make vegetables more fun to try.

Alternative ways of learning – Some kids like to use math, language, science, and art in the real world. In the garden they can plot the area of the garden beds to decide how much compost we should add, create signs to explain the types of plants, learn about the nutrients needed to amend soil, and build garden structures to beautify and enhance the garden's function.

Grow our own food – BMU's Food Services Director, Dena Baker, plans to grow and serve salad greens for the cafeteria's salad bar starting in spring 2017.

How did we build the garden?

Community businesses and individuals donated all the materials and money we needed, so our raised-bed garden has, to date, cost the school nothing to construct and manage.

Who gave us supplies and money?

The Passumpsic Savings Bank gave \$250

The Wooden House Company gave all of the milled lumber and topsoil

Absolute Power Sports loaned us a brand new tractor for four days to move the topsoil

WalMart gave us a \$25 gift certificate that we used to buy bags of compost

North Haverhill Agway gave seeds, plants, and seed potatoes

West Topsham's Riverside Grange donated plants

Peter St. Clair donated beautiful, healthy tomato plants

Groton Garage donated \$25

Ely Commission Sales donated \$20

George Hoyt donated \$25

Asplundh Tree Service donated all of the wood shavings for mulch

Who moved the soil and dumped it at the garden site?

Bob Longmoore drove the tractor loaned to us by Absolute Power Sports and used it to load his personal one-ton truck on Thursday, July 7, on site at The Wooden House Company. Brad Vietje drove the truck and dumped the soil at BMU.

Who assembled the raised wooden beds?

Brad Vietje and Daryl Perkins constructed the beds on Friday, July 8, 2016.

Who put the garden together?

The following people spent six hours on a hot, beautiful summer day laying down cardboard, shoveling and spreading wood shavings, carrying the wooden beds, filling them with soil, compost and fertilizer, then watering and planting them with more than a dozen different plants and seeds:

Dawn and Jessica Pinette
John Lundgren
Nancy Kane
Melanie Gonyaw
Beth, Ian and Nadia Fraser
Sandy and Faith Husky
Renee McWilliams
Linda Ide
Dena Baker
Collin Punderson
Bryannah Heywood
Nathan Steller
Morgan Cyrs
Caroline Nininger
Jenny Nelson
Bob Longmoore

Who watered and weeded the garden over the summer?

Linda Ide
Dr. Faith Homan
Sandy and Faith Husky

First Celebration September 30, 2016!

The BMU Garden's birthday is Monday, July 11, 2016, but we held our first celebration on Friday, September 30. The ten raised beds grew tomatoes, potatoes, chives, arugula, three kinds of lettuce, cabbages, beets, carrots, celery, radishes, sweet and hot peppers, sage, thyme, rosemary and lemon balm, pumpkins, and sun flowers. The first year!

We held our First Annual Harvest Celebration on Friday, September 30, attended by all students in pre-K through 6th grades. Vegetables were harvested by 5th and 6th graders, and then prepared by students in BMU's Hospitality Club under the supervision of staff member Donna Ashford.

The garden is meant to be self-sustaining; fund-raising activities will include twice-a-year rummage sales and the sale of vegetables and plants. We got our start through the generous donations of seeds and plants from North Haverhill Agway for our first year of planting, but future gardens will start with seeds purchased and raised through an existing high school science program in the school's existing greenhouse.

The garden is located behind the school building, on the southeast corner of the school's lawn. There is easy access to a water faucet and hose and the school greenhouse. It is also sheltered from prevailing westerly winds, while receiving direct sunlight from sunrise until 3:00 in the afternoon throughout the growing season. It is also close enough to the building to allow easy and frequent access for maintenance and harvest.

Plans were developed and presented to the BMU School Board for approval before permission was given and construction began. A set of criteria are in place to help guide future construction. The criteria include making all growing beds accessible to gardeners in wheelchairs, and

The Garden Steering Committee is made up of a group of adult volunteers from the school and community. They planned, built, and continue to steer the garden's progress:

Garden Coordinator: Linda Ide

BMU employee volunteers: Beth Fraser, Melanie Gonyaw, Nancy Kane, Bob Longmoore, Dena Baker.

Community volunteers: Sandy Husky (Groton), Renee McWilliams (Groton), Dawn Pinette (Groton), John Lundgren (Groton), Caroline Nininger (The Wooden House Company in Wells River), Jenny Nelson (Ryegate Corners).

More than 20 volunteers built the school garden on one beautiful, sunny day, Monday, July 11, 2016. We started laying down cardboard as mulch at 8:00 that morning and finished watering the newly planted cabbage seedlings by 2:00 in the afternoon!

Throughout the summer volunteers attended the garden weekly to keep it watered and weeded so we could enjoy the harvest this fall!

Donors:

Passumpsic Savings Bank
The Wooden House Company
North Haverhill Agway
WalMart
Groton Garage

Ely Commission Sales
George Hoyt
Peter Sinclair
West Topsham Riverside Grange

List of Garden Volunteers:

Bryannah Heywood
Collin Punderson
Nathan Steller
Darryl Perkins
Brad Vietje
Dena Baker
Bob Longmoore
Melanie Gonyaw
Sandy Husky
Faith Husky
Renee McWilliams
John Lundgren
Dawn Pinette
Jessica Pinette
Caroline Nininger
Morgan Cyrs
Linda Ide
Beth Fraser
Nadia Fraser
Ian Fraser
Nancy Kane
Mike Gordon
Daryl Sulham
(more)

Our first harvest:

Green peppers
Jalapeno peppers
Tomatoes (6 or 7 varieties)
Green cabbage
Red cabbage
Potatoes
Carrots
Celery

Radishes
Lettuce (3 varieties)
Arugula
Strawberries
Chives
Sage
Rosemary
Thyme
Lemon balm
Pumpkins
Sunflowers

We are looking forward to the upcoming growing season!

-Linda Ide,
BMU Garden Coordinator