

# Home & Garden

e-mail editor@cfpmidweek.com

**Fast Fact:**

Americans throw away 25 million plastic bottles every hour.

Source: dosomething.org

## GREEN LEARNING

### Community effort brings native plant gardening to Hickory Hills School

By Regina Wang

When buckets of soil-less peat and perlite mix were dumped on the table, the chattering in Kathy Wilks' kindergarten class suddenly stopped, followed by sighs of wonder.

Before anyone had a chance to react, student Jacob Fisher asked his question with desperation. "Can we keep what we plant?"

Kay Johnson, instructor and keeper of the greenhouse at Hickory Hills School, nodded, explaining to Fisher as he had hundreds of times to other kindergarteners: Yes, you can take it home in a month before school gets out.

Delighted, Fisher grinned, holding a green bean seed in his hand.

"My dad is gonna be so proud of me because we need some green beans for dinner," he said.

This was an example of what Johnson loves about his volunteer work. Since last year, the Master Gardener has been teaching the students at Hickory Hills the joys of planting and harvesting in the school's rooftop greenhouse. Besides green beans, they will get to grow pumpkins, watermelons, carrots and soft-



Photos by Regina Wang

Master Gardener Kay Johnson tells the students in Beth Zeh's class that they can bring home these green bean plants in a month. Collaboration among various organizations made Hickory Hills School's outdoor classroom a reality.

ball-size onions. Last year alone they grew more than 2,700 native Missouri plants from seed.

This outdoor classroom was made possible through the collaboration of government agencies and local nonprofits — such as Missouri Department of Conservation, City of Springfield, Master Gardeners of Greene County, Springfield-Greene County Park Board, Missouri Prairie Foundation and the University of Missouri Greene County. The goal

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- Christine Chiu, president, Master Gardeners of Greene County.

is to grow Missouri native plants from seed and plant them throughout the campus on State Highway YY.

Known as the first 'green' school in southwest Missouri, Hickory Hills is LEED certified. (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design.)

The program would not

have been possible without volunteers like Johnson, said principal Kelly Allison.

"Because of limited funds and staff, it's hard to run a greenhouse," Allison said. "Without the Master Gardeners and Kay to volunteer their time, there's no way we could've pulled off what we've

done here."

Though the volunteers planted them only in February, many of the seeds have already sprouted. The students and volunteers will transplant them into pots, which will be taken out to the roof. In September grades six through eight will participate in planting the flowers in the school's prairie garden bioswale, rain gardens and aquatic life pond.

Landscaping with native plants cuts down on labor, Johnson said, because they last much longer than exotic plants once



Kindergartener Chloe Coble experiences soil-less peat and perlite mix.

they are established. Some of their roots extend 15 feet into the ground.

"They are hardy," Johnson said.

While the kindergarteners are not going to grasp how resilient native plants are, Johnson said their strong curiosity and interest in gardening has surprised him greatly.

Last year he invited the students to dig up sweet potatoes. But the first class — the kindergarteners — dug them all out before anyone else could get to them. Johnson had to have them replant the vegetables so the next class could enjoy some digging.

Everyone got a kick out of seeing 5-year-olds yank a 6-pound sweet potato out from the ground. In the end, they were replanted and dug out 15 times.

Johnson, 80, said he decided to become a Master Gardener to teach kids to grow plants. He appreciates the opportunity to share his knowledge with the little ones.

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# Farmers Market of the Ozarks popular destination



Photo courtesy FMO

The largest farmers market in the region is a popular hot spot.

## Market gears up for one-year anniversary, responds to demand

By Regina Wang

The customers have spoken and the Farmers Market of the Ozarks (FMO) has responded by expanding its operations.

"We started the Tuesday market because a lot of customers had asked us to," said manager Lane McConnell.

Since its opening day last year, FMO has drawn over 100 vendors and 6,000 customers each week, making it a popular spot in Springfield.

"We make a destination for people to come to enjoy local music and food sampling," McConnell said. "We really focus on the community and want to give back to the community."

The largest market in the region, FMO will celebrate its one-year anniversary April 6. Activities include live music, food sampling, cooking demonstrations and fun games for kids. Beer and wine sampling will also be available, provided by Springfield Brewing Company and

### Farmers Market of the Ozarks

**Location:** Under white tents on Nature Center Way, right off Republic Road and James River Expressway  
**Hours:** 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Tuesdays and Saturdays  
 FMO Accepts SNAP, credit and debit card transactions  
**Website:** LoveYourFarmer.com and Facebook

Whispering Oaks Winery.

McConnell said what makes FMO unique is that it offers products people cannot find anywhere else, like fresh seafood — oyster, crawfish and shrimp — straight from Louisiana's salty Gulf waters. FMO is also a good place for everyday goods like fruits and vegetables as well as items like artisan bread, pasta, cheese, candles and stained glass.

And since everybody knows it's a bad idea to shop for groceries on an empty stomach, the market has a remedy for that too. People can feast on a wide array of hot food selections for both breakfast and lunch. Shoppers will find food trucks that specialize in French crepes, Peruvian cuisine and freshly squeezed fruit juice.

Right now, FMO is temporarily located under white tents on Nature Center Way, right off Republic Road and James River Expressway. In June it will move to its permanent home at Farmers Park on East Republic Road by Houlihan's restaurant. Developed by Matt O'Reilly, owner of Dynamic Earth and the Green Circles Shopping Center, Farmers Park will also house retail stores, offices, apartments and restaurants.

McConnell said FMO seeks to make fresh local produce available to Springfield shoppers.

"We want a market that will serve the needs of our community, provide more access to local food and give farmers a nice, inviting environment and be profitable," said McConnell.

### KIDS GO GREEN, from 15

"For me personally it's what keeps me alive," he said. "I like that kids can touch these plants, smell them, taste them."

When a student shrinks away from touching soil, crying that they don't want to get their hands dirty, Johnson gently drops some soil in their hands. They say: Oh that's not so bad and they start feeling excited about gardening.

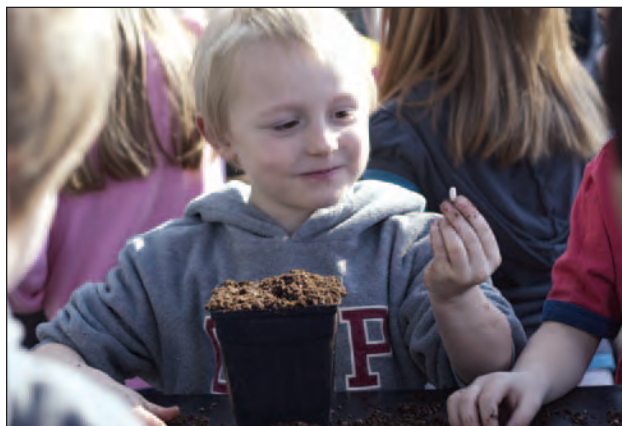


Photo by Regina Wang

Jacob Fisher, a kindergartener at Hickory Hills School, is excited to plant a green bean seed.

Teaching children to love nature is of great importance, Johnson said. "They will be the stewards of the earth. The more they know about growing these plants, the better off we all will be."

Christine Chiu, president of Master Gardeners of Greene County, said that's the kind of impact that she knew the program would have. She has already heard positive feedback from the community.

It is the passion and endeavors of these volunteers that made the project a reality, she said.

"This is one of the most rewarding projects I've ever been involved with as a member for 11 years."

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