

News

> [Local News](#) > [News](#)

[Print this Page](#)

[<--back to story](#)

Garden teachers cultivate new ideas

Big Isle conference draws instructors from across Hawaii

By MELISSA TANJI, Staff Writer

POSTED: August 22, 2010

A single harvest of corn yielded many lessons for Sacred Hearts School students last week.

After picking hybrid Indian corn from the school garden, the students were counting kernels that came in yellow, blue, dark brown and a rainbow of other colors.

"Today we were doing math with corn. Corn math," science enrichment teacher Ed Mahoney said Thursday.

The lessons also involved a discussion of genetics, the history of corn used by Native Americans as well as a taste test of their bounty - without the greasy additives found on movie theater popcorn.

Mahoney and three other Maui teachers were able to learn more about how to use school gardens in their daily curriculum, and shared ideas with other teachers from schools with garden programs, at the 3rd annual Summer School Garden Teacher Conference, supported by The Kohala Center, in Waimea on the Big Island in July.

Mahoney was joined by Kathy Becklin of Kihei Elementary School, Lisa Dailly of Haiku Elementary School and Craig Eckert of Montessori School of Maui. The four were selected for the conference by Lehn Huff, University of Hawaii Maui College Sustainable Living Institute of Maui interim director.

SLIM was established by the college and Maui Land & Pineapple Co. as a center for gathering information, generating new knowledge, developing applications and validating appropriate technologies for eco-effectiveness and sustainable living.

Huff, who is also the coordinator of the Maui School Garden Network, said that teachers were able to do seed exchanges, share photos of their school gardens, as well as learn composting and vermiculture. They also learned techniques for food preparation, such as recipes for vinaigrette dressing.

The conference, held at the Mala'ai Culinary Garden at Waimea Middle School, attracted 75 teachers from across the state who got involved in exploring and developing school garden curriculum with the Center for Ecoliteracy from Berkeley, Calif., and the Hawaii island garden teachers.

The Maui teachers were able to attend the conference with support from Maui Tomorrow, Maui County Farm Bureau and the Maui Farmers' Union.

Mahoney said in addition to reinforcing the curriculum he has already put in place, he learned new things at the conference, including setting up a harvest log to show the students the value of the work they performed in the garden.

For example, normally students could say it didn't cost them any money to grow a tomato because they don't pay for the tomato like they do in the store, but with the harvest log, the students will be able to factor in their sweat equity, like the time they took to water and weed, and other chores to sustain the plants.

Eckert, Montessori's gardening teacher, said that he learned from the conference that the country is facing a serious decline in the number of farmers.

"We really need to get a lot of kids interested in making food for ourselves," he said.

That's especially true on Maui where we are dependent on imported food from the Mainland, he said.

Eckert said the future is pointing to sustainability, which is what his program at Montessori also teaches.

Article Photos



Sacred Hearts School photo

Sacred Hearts School student Rhyn Lendio (from left), teacher Ed Mahoney and student Kaile Stockham check seed production on a sunflower at the school's garden in Lahaina. Mahoney was one of four Maui teachers to attend the 3rd annual Summer School Garden Teacher Conference on the Big Island in July. Mahoney was able to learn new things to incorporate into his garden curriculum.

Mahoney agrees that teaching children how to grow and plant things will help in the future, including times like these when the economy is down.

He also teaches students how to preserve foods and the chemistry behind it.

Also from the conference, Eckert said he especially liked how one school has a few minutes of silence before students work on the garden.

He said the silence is "for them to arrive at the garden and let go of whatever they are learning outside of the garden and kind of mentally arrive. That was something I learned from the conference. It was little things like that that were helpful."

Huff, who also attended the conference, explained that at the Mala'ai Garden in Waimea, managers have a protocol for their students that requires a student to stand silent in the garden for two minutes and just observe and listen.

"The introduction to the garden involves two minutes of silent pule (prayer). For two minutes, you find a spot where you stand alone and keep quiet to contain yourself in the garden before you do anything else. You focus," Huff said.

"In two minutes, you see a lot. You're outside, there's so much natural activity, bees feeding on the flowers, the sun and shade, there's so much to capture your attention about what is in the garden. The aina is a remarkable teacher."

Huff said there are 30 schools on Maui that have school gardens, about half at private schools and half at public or charter schools.

She said the teachers she selected to attend the conference reflected a mix of public and private schools, veteran and new teachers, geographic variety and the ability to influence a large group.

At Montessori School, Eckert also oversees the "Seed to Table" program, where students grow food to support school lunches.

The students plant lettuce and salad greens and carrots that all go into the salad for the lunch. Students also prepare salad dressing, Eckert said.

Each class at the school also has its own garden programs, he added - for example, one grade may grow vegetables to make a stir-fry or soup.


Students also have fruit trees in the garden, such as orange, mango and lychee, and lilikoi vines, using the fruits to make orangeade, POG and lilikoi lemonade.

Eckert is also able to incorporate other class curriculum into his lessons in the garden, for example one day a teacher wanted to discuss invertebrates, so he talked about worms. Younger grades may count beans from a pod to learn math skills and older students may study plumbing and water pressure.










* Melissa Tanji can be reached at mtanji@mauinews.com.

[Subscribe to The Maui News](#)

 Recommend

 Be the first of your friends to recommend this.

Share:

 Facebook  MySpace  Digg  Stumble  Buzz up!  Mixx  Fark  del.icio.us  LiveSpaces