



Biodiversity - Our chook shed & vegetable patch

In 2008 Creswick North Primary School, Creswick Primary School and St Augustine's embarked on their journey to become Five Star Sustainable schools.

As a result, Creswick North implemented new practices and here we share the initial success of our work in biodiversity and the related cooking elective.

We completed our chook shed, using mostly recycled materials, and introduced a rooster and five hens to their new home. In June 2008, Jim Mead from Landcare, together with our students, planted our first crop of winter vegetables. By October we enjoyed fresh produce – the success of spinach, broccoli, garlic and mint all grown in abundance, together with our eggs, were the main ingredients used in our recipes.



Above - Students, parents and friends came together for the grand opening of our chook shed – 10 November 2008



Jim plants the spinach with Rhys (Prep) and Josh (Year 1) June 2008 and in Late October, Emily, Natalie, Erin, Leigh and Jessica, from the upper grades, cut the leaves ready for cooking.

A cooking elective, for twelve students was formed. They were introduced to taste-testing, gained knowledge about ingredients where appropriate and worked in *The Little Red Hen Club*. All participants know that behind the scenes considerable work is required- preparing the beds, planting, weeding and watering before we enjoy the *fruits of our labour*.

Our venture into cooking has been successful despite our lack of sophisticated cooking equipment. Bearing this in mind, we chose recipes that could easily be prepared using a fry pan or small oven. We baked cheese and spinach flan, cooked omelettes, prepared English mint sauce, potato salad, stir fry and vegetable pasties.

Last November we planted our summer crop. Students arranged plants using *companion planting* ideas (See Landlearn PD – Learning in the Garden). Corn, peas, beans, tomatoes, basil, Italian and Continental parsley, thyme, lettuce, rhubarb, strawberries, carrots, zucchini and cucumber were planted. The corn, beans, peas or rhubarb were unsuccessful but we currently have a plentiful supply of tomatoes, herbs, zucchini and cucumber. Again our recipes were chosen with this *supply* in mind.



Brett picks another zucchini from the garden.

This term we prepared pancakes and French toast from our eggs. We also prepared a vegetable slice from our zucchini and made mini-pizzas. Students made their dough base, and used freshly-picked cherry and yellow pear tomatoes, thyme and basil for the topping. With our abundant supply of tomatoes, basil, thyme and cucumber we created a colourful salad and tossed them with some bocconcini, avocado, capers, olive oil and balsamic vinegar. By the end of term, our students will make a pavlova using egg-whites and decorate it with the ripening strawberries. Finally students will prepare a vegetable pastie using zucchini and eggs and grate carrots into a cake with frosting.



Courtney, Bonnie, Amber, Jessica, Sara, Taylor, Emily – Creswick North style pizza using our tomatoes, thyme and basil.

The students enjoyed taste-testing. Whenever possible, they sampled different foods and flavours that complement our produce. For example, using the mint sauce, students enjoyed crumbed cutlets, goat's cheese and fried haloumi cheese.

As a bonus, we sell our food in the Eco-Shop. This term our Sustainability Captains sold pancakes, French toast, mini-pizzas and zucchini slice to customers. Our students care for the chooks on a daily basis. They also enjoy picking tomatoes as a playtime snack.

As we gain experience in this area our cyclic approach to planting will develop and as will the recipes based on the produce from our garden.

Creswick North also worked in other areas of biodiversity throughout 2008. In June we accessed Landcare Grant funds and had a tree planting day on National Tree Day. Students worked with Max Coulter, one of our Grandparents to identify native, indigenous and exotic trees in our yard. The students then worked with Jim to plant out areas of the school yard with indigenous trees. Students learnt about optimum conditions for plant growth and know, in the future, these new plantings will attract more birds, insects and animals (biodiversity) to their school yard.

In our water module, the students also identified macro-invertebrates (another aspect of biodiversity) in the water and found out they were indicators of water quality.

Our work within the biodiversity module continues in 2009...

Please contact doull.susan.j@edumail.vic.gov.au or visit our website www.creswicknorthps.vic.edu.au if you would like any further information or recipes.