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Gardening with Kids: Nutrition from the Ground Up

Ah March! It's that hopeful time of year when spring starts to green up the earth around us. It's the time of year when gardeners begin to dream of summer produce and to start seedlings indoors and out. March is also National Nutrition Month® (www.eatright.org/nnm/), a delicious time to celebrate eating right.

"The 2010 Nutrition Month theme, *Nutrition from the Ground Up*, also makes March the perfect time to celebrate some recent Montana success stories," says Linda Hogg, RD (registered dietitian), and chair of Eat Right Montana's (ERM) Mini-Grant Program. "ERM's 2009 Going Green Mini-Grant awards were designed to encourage smart waste management practices by reducing, reusing, and/or recycling. Not surprisingly, several of the 12 mini-grants (\$500 each) focused on Montana gardening projects, often with children."

At the Helena School Age Child Care Program (SACC), grant coordinator Susan Held and SACC students used their ERM grant to go green with an educational, much admired, and quite productive gardening project. Ms. Held built on an existing three-year garden effort, teaching children and their families about growing vegetables while reusing and recycling materials to explore nutrition from the ground up.

By any measure, the SACC garden spaces at Jefferson and Broadwater Schools were great successes. "The SACC students loved working in the garden - mowing, weeding, clipping, and picking the fruits of their labors. We ate fresh veggies during summer and froze pumpkin puree to make bread and bars in the fall. We were also able to donate more than 85 pounds of produce to Helena Food Share," notes Held proudly. Here are just a few of the many 'green' lessons that SACC students learned by having fun in the garden:

- **Vegetables are delicious and nutritious.** Children and their families had the chance to enjoy veggies at the peak of freshness. Many enjoyed items they thought they would never like, both raw and cooked.
- **Cooking from scratch tastes great and is easy to do.** The gardens' vegetables provided the opportunity for several cooking lessons, from ham and vegetable soup to homemade pumpkin bread.
- **Vegetables can be grown in small spaces and in reused containers.** The SACC students grew vegetables in an amazing variety of containers, from milk jugs to plastic bottles and reused buckets to Styrofoam cups.

Eat Right Montana urges Montana families and schools to celebrate Nutrition Month 2010 by planning a garden for this summer. "When kids grow nutrient-rich produce themselves, they literally learn nutrition from the ground up. They also learn eating habits for a lifetime of good health," says Hogg, who works at MSU Student Health Service in Bozeman. She recommends these online resources for gardening help.

- **ERM 2009 Mini-Grant Program:** Summary and project links @ www.eatrightmontana.org/grants.html
- **School Garden Wizard:** Step-by-step instructions and lessons @ www.schoolgardenwizard.org/
- **MSU Extension:** Everything related to gardening in Montana @ <http://gardenguide.montana.edu>

Past and current issues of Eat Right Montana's monthly packets can be downloaded for free at www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrightthehealthyfamilies.htm

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