

How does your garden grow?

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Eat your vegetables or you don't get any dessert. Chomp on those carrots, they're good for your eyes. Clean your plate up because there are starving children in other parts of the world.

These are some of the things parents may tell their children in order to try to get them to eat veggies. But a new program presented by Austin Hy-Vee registered dietitian Jen Haugen may give kids a new perspective on things like spinach, tomatoes and other vegetables.

It's called "Sprouts - Get Out and Grow," a garden and cooking program from kids aimed at giving them a seed-to-table experience to help their education and love of vegetables grow.

"They'll hopefully gain a better appreciation for vegetables and start liking them," said Haugen.

She led the first weekly class of the summer Wednesday morning in the 40-by-60-foot garden area in Hy-Vee's parking lot. Few supermarkets have held a program of this kind, geared toward children ages 3 to 9.

Nine youngsters from the child care program Kids Korner were the gardeners on this particular sunny morning. Haugen identified various types of veggies with them, including a zucchini, which looks deceptively like a cucumber or a pickle to the young eye.

Each child also dug a hole in the soil, planted a vegetable like tomatoes, peppers and spinach, watered it and then planted some seeds as well. What they produce in the garden will be used throughout their classes in the summer.

Cooking is another segment of the class. With the gathered ingredients, kids made a "spinach salad with lemony dressing." They used small colanders to wash the spinach leaves, squeezed lemon juice and then gave their finished product a taste test.

"I think it went really well," Haugen said. "This was a good first class. The kids were really eager to come out."

They also have journals where they will keep track of what they learned at each class and how they liked certain vegetables. They can mark three choices for the vegetable of that week: I liked it, I liked it a little bit, or I don't like it yet. That last one is in hopes of trying to get kids to stay away from saying "I don't like it;" being positive is one of the class rules, Haugen said.

One of the goals is to teach kids about where food comes from, how it grows and then apply that knowledge by cooking the vegetables, Haugen said.

"I'm hoping to make a difference," Haugen said.

They will focus on one vegetable per class but also return to ones they've already tried. Exposing them to veggies is important and sometimes it can take up to 20 times before kids may like a certain vegetable.

The program for an outdoor garden and cooking classroom was made possible through a grant from the

Statewide Health Improvement Program. Students from an advanced cabinetry course at Austin High School led by teacher Terry Carlson constructed the raised garden beds for the class.