



## Growing Success: How School Gardens are Blooming Beyond the Classroom

**When a group of dads and their kids gathered for a weekend campout at their local school, Rochedale South State School, they didn't expect to be part of something that would grow into a thriving educational initiative. Yet there they were, shifting soil into garden beds, laying the literal groundwork for what would become a vibrant Pick of the Crop school garden program.**

"Having that community connection to get the garden started was wonderful," shares the program's school champion. "The garden is now maintained by students 2 days a week who participate in Garden Club - it's free for all, whoever's available and wants to come can join in."

### More Than Just Growing Plants

This isn't your typical school garden - it's a living classroom where strawberries teach patience, and composting demonstrates the circle of life. The harvest might be modest - "We did grow 1 pumpkin last year, and that got cut in half and kids took half a pumpkin home" - but the real yield is measured in student growth and engagement.

The garden has become a sanctuary for students who might otherwise struggle during break times. "Kids love to participate in something where they feel like they're making a difference and contributing to the big community," the champion explains. "Rather than just playing, they come along and participate in something that's making a real difference."

*A program delivered by*



### From Seeds to Leaders

What makes this program special is how it cultivates leadership alongside vegetables. Students who show dedication earn special responsibilities - like being "in charge of the hose once they've shown they're responsible". It's these small steps that build confidence and ownership. The garden currently boasts an impressive variety of crops such as capsicum, leek, lettuce, beans, tomatoes, strawberries and herbs such as thyme, mint, lemongrass, basil.

But perhaps the most exciting residents are the bees. "We have our rescued beehive that we brought in, which is extremely resilient. It has survived multiple setbacks, but there's still bees in it, which tells me that there must be a queen still there!"



### Learning Beyond the Garden Beds

The program has sprouted numerous educational opportunities. Students have become teachers themselves, running information stations during special events. "They did a little workshop on recycling... students had - all by themselves - researched some bee facts, made some posters and held a little quiz about bees," the champion proudly shares.

*An initiative of*





These student-led initiatives extend to environmental education, with kids teaching their peers about:

- Correct recycling practices
- Bee conservation
- Composting and worm farming
- Marine ecology and environmental impact



### Challenges: Not All Gardens Grow Easy

Like any garden, the program faces its share of challenges. "...Trouble finding parent volunteers and then just the gardening type of challenges, like 'what bug is this?' or rats getting in the garden," the champion admits. The recent solution? "I have invested some of our grant in nets to cover the garden beds to keep rodents out, and so far that's been successful."

A bigger challenge is ensuring the program's sustainability. "I really feel like if I left the school, the program would end," the coordinator confesses. This has led to creative solutions, like considering moving garden club to morning sessions to encourage more parent involvement and avoid the scorching midday sun.

### Beds Cultivating Future Growth

Despite the challenges, the program continues to evolve and adapt. New initiatives include:

- Moving to morning sessions to increase parent participation
- Expanding volunteer recruitment efforts

- Hosting regular workshops with external experts

- Integrating with wider school events and activities.

"One of the side benefits of gardening is that perseverance - it doesn't work every time. In fact, you've got to try different things so it builds resilience," reflects the champion. This philosophy seems to apply not just to the plants, but to the program itself.

The garden has also become a space for emotional learning and growth. "The garden is used to take children to, when they need to reset or calm down," explains the champion. "We talk about gardening processes and how that links to human growth and development... that it takes time to nurture ourselves, and sometimes learning a new skill can be like planting a seed."

### Looking to the Future

As the program enters its next growing season, the focus is on sustainability and growth. With continued support from Pick of the Crop and increasing community involvement, this program demonstrates how school gardens can grow far beyond their beds to nurture both plants and people.

It's a testament to how a simple garden can transform into something much more significant - a place where learning, community, and growth combine to create something truly special. As one student harvest leads to another, this initiative continues to demonstrate that when you plant the seeds of engagement and nurture them with dedication, the results can be truly extraordinary, growing far beyond their beds to nurture both plants and people.

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