

THE HEALTHY BODIES PROJECT

at Penn State

Farm to Early Care and Education Activities

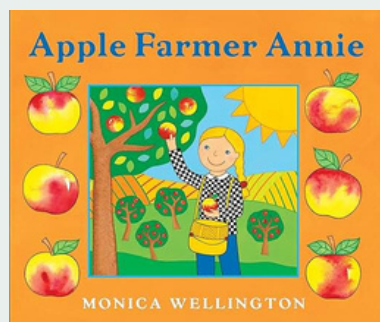
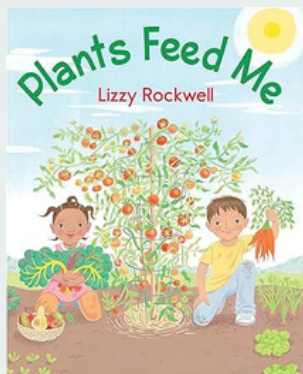
Food Literacy

Preschool students were introduced to a new fruit, vegetable or other nutrient-dense food (e.g., mozzarella cheese) each week from A-Z through a curriculum called Eating the Alphabet. Children learned about how the food grows or is produced, why it's good for our growing bodies, and then they had an opportunity to taste the food. On average 87% of children were willing to try each food weekly. One teacher stated, "The children really looked forward to tasting the new foods and were more receptive to it than they are during mealtimes. Even some of my pickiest eaters would at least lick some of the foods to try."



Weekly Food Tasting

Teachers also read stories about gardening, and some teachers went above and beyond expectations to create visuals to discuss how each food grows or is produced. Our teachers are amazing!



Indoor Gardening at Bright Futures Learning Center

To extend learning about fruits and vegetables beyond our weekly lessons, Bright Futures teachers grew a variety of vegetables in hydroponic gardens in their indoor classrooms throughout the year.



Growing Kale, Lettuce, Peppers and Other Vegetables in Hydroponic Gardens

Installing New Outdoor Gardens at Bright Futures

We partnered with the center's director, Shayla Mitchell, and a local Master Gardener, Katherine Scott, to install raised beds in an unused playground in Summer 2024. A total of eight beds were installed, and a variety of foods were planted, including tomatoes, squash, beans and herbs. Approximately 30 preschoolers were engaged in gardening activities weekly, including sensory learning, food tastings and stories. Children were also able to visit a local market to taste some fruits that were growing in the garden. At the end of the summer, we facilitated a garden party, making and tasting salsa, corn salad, fruit kabab, melon salad, and watermelon and mint juice. The center director said, "The summer garden at Bright Futures has taught our kids what it means to build a sense of community. They got to be hands-on, work as a team, and learn about the importance of eating fruits and vegetables. I'm excited about what this garden will bring to Bright Futures in the coming months!"



Sensory play with herbs in the garden.



Master Gardener Katherine Scott noted that the garden "brought much enthusiasm and excitement from the staff and children. Bright Futures' community and staff were our lifeline for keeping our plants healthy and growing strong."



Creating bird feeders to attract pollinators.