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GARDEN PROFILE:

Thematic Gardens of Heathwood Hall



Imagine yourself in 5th grade. You get to drive through farm fields to enter the school grounds. Your class designs specialty gardens in class and grows plants in a greenhouse with a helix staircase. You get to go outside to examine plants in gardens that other students installed. You hunt insects, you shovel mulch, you dig for worms. You eat food in the cafeteria that was harvested that very day that was grown by you and other students. Your parents are welcome to come help harvest (and weed!) Sound like utopia? Welcome to Heathwood Hall in West Columbia.

Todd Beasley is an instructor and SEED Director (School of Environmental Education) at Heathwood Hall. He teaches 5th grade Environmental Science and 12th grade Advanced Biology. He manages the 12+ Thematic Gardens that allow students to learn about the ecosystem, art, geography, biology, and food production. He is immensely qualified for the work: he holds a bachelor's degree in criminal justice (1998), a master's degree in earth and environmental resource management (2008), and an education doctorate in curriculum and instruction (2014), all from USC. He has worked in plant retail sales at Jarrett's Jungle, served as nursery production manager for Riverbank's Zoo, and is a part time instructor of horticulture at Midlands Technical College.

Todd isn't a lone ranger at Heathwood Hall. Many instructors and administrators work in the gardens when he puts out a call for mulching or a large installation is scheduled. According to Beasley, interest level is at the gold level for all things garden related. Instructor Valerie Moore manages the Earth Tub and other composting activities in her early childhood classes while Jim Morris sponsors the 10th grade biology buddies activities. Molly Roddey led the drive that brought bees to campus for preschool studies and Mary Stuart Hardy manages the Herb Garden projects. Donnie Bain, Head of Middle School, claims that the gardens at Heathwood give





students a real laboratory to learn historical and cultural implications of plants, as well as an opportunity to understand their personal role in environmental conservation which can lead to responsible actions and ecosystem benefits. The SEED program accesses the resources of parents, faculty, and students who meet monthly to plan garden installation and events.

Students from multiple classes engage with the gardens. Art classes may harvest sweetgrass

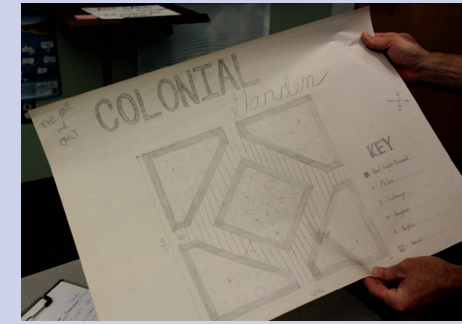


for ephemeral sculpture projects, gather flowers to create pigments and dyes, or learn ikebana, Japanese flower arranging. Latin classes learn the botanical names of plants. Fifth grade geography students study biodiversity and biomes in the Geography Garden while 3rd graders study Native Americans in the Medicine Wheel Garden. Beasley's classes learn to design and research plants as well as to learn the interactions between plants and animals. His students also are responsible for sorting classroom and office recycling bin materials on campus. They add materials to the compost bins to learn and appreciate the art of decomposition and healthy soil construction. Rotation of duties and a strong emphasis on safety keep the program popular while class competitions are designed to make work fun.



Ninth to 12th grade students at Heathwood Hall are required to perform 20 hours of community service work per year. Some students (including the football and wrestling teams) will request work in the gardens on the campus grounds while other students ask to tend a vegetable garden installed at Harvest Hope Food Bank. Food from the edible gardens, particularly herbs, carrots and radishes, often flavor meals served in the campus dining commons. Radishes flavor the aioli sauce used on baked potatoes and carrots appear in soup. Sixteen pounds of peaches were harvested from one UF Gold tree (University of Florida introduction) this season while surplus produce is donated to Harvest Hope Food Bank. Each year 200 lbs. of produce is delivered to the food bank and Beasley is estimating delivering 300 lbs. this year. Students proudly produce high quality plant material in the greenhouse and in the field for the annual plant sales. They experience marketing by creating flyers and sending personal invitations to businesses and potential customers. Kindergarteners use dehydrators to dry herbs which are also sold at the plant sale. Leftover plants are donated to City of Columbia, Historic Columbia Foundation, and to Columbia Green, to use in landscape beautification projects.

All of the theme gardens are meaningful. There is a Carolina Bay Garden, and Edible Forest, a Butterfly Garden, a Xeric Garden, and a Riparian Garden. Over 500 plant species are available for viewing or study. Some gardens have local sponsors such as Columbia Green, a 501c3 dedicated to landscape beautification in



the Columbia area. The Medicine Wheel Garden holds particular meaning due to the appearance of a Native American Cherokee chief who offered a ceremonial blessing.

In addition to performing community service work, donating plants, and delivering produce to the food bank; the SEED Committee hosted a Farm to Table event this past May. Over 100 people attended and the local organic production company City Roots catered the affair. Another remarkable event is scheduled to occur next July 14-16 when the American Horticulture Society hosts the National Children's Garden Symposium and Conference in Columbia, SC. The site was chosen due to the eloquent proposal written by Todd Beasley. Heathwood Hall and its gardens will be featured at this national event and will no doubt inspire many other schools and organizations.

