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NEWS

Multiple projects grow from Oceana student gardens



photo by Jean Bartlett Science teacher Ryan Reidy holds a pumpkin growing under the shade of the plant's leaves.

By **JEAN BARTLETT** | Pacifica Tribune

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There are two gardens at Oceana High School. One is called the Demo/Nursery Garden and the other is the New Plot. The demo part of the first garden began in 2004, when students in the high school's Green Club established a greenhouse. In 2009, inspired by the Green Club's garden dream as well as a spring "Interim Week" elective which took him to Pie Ranch, www.pieranch.org, Oceana freshman Naftali Moed decided to bring what he had learned about sustainable gardening to Oceana to transform a gravel lot to a school garden.

"The Green Club had an idea of what we have created here and Naftali was the student that put the energy into bringing the many groups together that established the garden that you see today," said Oceana science teacher Ryan Reidy.

Included among the foods currently growing in the demo garden are: pumpkins, zucchini, Brussels sprouts, red leaf lettuce, Vidalia (sweet) onions and, experimentally, honeydew melons. Other demo garden "finds" include: a student/faculty/community built pergola, turnips, pole beans, bush beans, rhubarb, an herb spiral, lemons and passion fruit. When the drought passes the hope is the raspberry plants will produce fruit.

"We also have five chickens in the garden," Reidy noted. "They give us eggs and have been helping to establish our soil."

One of the core things needed for successful sustainable gardening practices is healthy soil. Composted chicken manure enriches plants with phosphorus, nitrogen and potassium. The chickens are free-range.

"They get to peck at bugs and plants and enjoy their daytime pasture," Reidy said. "At night, on weekends and during holidays, they are kept safe in their yellow coop which is surrounded by a chain link fence. They are not pets, but I must admit I have a dear relationship with each and every one of them."

The native plant nursery part of the Demo/Nursery Garden was established at the school 18 years ago by the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, to grow native plants for restoration work at Golden Gate National Park sites Mori Point and Milagra Ridge, here in Pacifica. Oceana students participate in the habitat restoration work.

Reidy, who has taught fulltime at Oceana since 1998, teaches ninth and tenth grade earth science, tenth grade biology, and eleventh and twelfth grade agricultural and environmental sciences. He has been the primary tender of the garden over the summer with assistance from students from the HomeSlice Youth Internship Program with Pie Ranch. During the school year, Reidy will also teach the Garden Advisory course normally taught by Oceana teacher Laurie Hughes while Hughes is on sabbatical.



“We have many partnerships and student teams here at Oceana involved in both the Demo/Nursery Garden and the New Plot,” Reidy said. “The Pie Ranch HomeSlice team is made up of students not just from Oceana but several other local high schools. The onsite National Parks nursery provides community service hours to a number of our Oceana students. Garden Advisory students are constantly involved with the garden during the school year as are students in agricultural science. Our food and nutrition classes are connected to the gardens and our environmental science students often participate in building garden infrastructure (such as drip irrigation).”

The New Plot was recently established just the other side of the demo garden. Currently growing is: chard, sunflowers, cucumbers, cantaloupe, two varieties of tomatoes, onions, some broccoli and butternut squash, and some “experimental” corn. With minimal assistance from Reidy and an educator from Pie Ranch, Oceana students determine what is appropriate for the garden season, which must take into account plants that are friendly co-inhabitants as well as plant heights, to prevent damaging shade to neighboring plants. In the New Plot, the aim is to have anywhere from 32 to 35 raised beds which hopefully will discourage gophers. Gophers have been far too busy in the demo garden as have rabbits and white-crowned sparrows.

Reidy said his favorite part of the day is “coming out each morning to see how the gardens are growing.”

“This is hands-on learning,” Reidy said. “It offers students the opportunity to do real world science, real world career related activities, in high school. During the school year, we have fundraising events and we really encourage the public to come and see how our students have taken ownership of sustainable gardening.”

Visit www.ohs.juhsd.net for more information on Oceana High School’s gardens. Oceana garden information is also available on Facebook and other social media.

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