

Dear Stratford Landing Parents,

Are any of your children wondering why the pumpkins have vanished? Or why the three sisters' garden is now nine different pillars of dried corn stalks and a few scattered beans?

The short answer: all plants squash related were inundated by pests this summer, probably because of our very wet spring. And that early, wet weather, combined with the no toxic chemicals philosophy of our the garden, added up to too many pests for us to...can you guess? SQUASH!

If you are curious about specifics of the pumpkins' demise, here are a few: we had **squash bugs** by the thousands (they look like stink bugs but they are gray; when we would water, they would come out in droves), **vine borers** (worms that embed themselves in the pumpkin stalks and slowly kill the plants—if you're a pumpkin farmer, you can perform surgery by cutting the vine, pulling out the worm, taping the plant back together, and crossing your fingers), AND **powdery mildew**. All in all, it was a pesticide disaster for our pumpkins. And most gardeners around here fared no better. But right now in this space, there are zinnias, watermelon, and beans, partially from seeds we had leftover...we popped these in late to keep the area from looking completely barren.



Three Sisters' Garden?

When the pumpkins began to die in the kindergarten garden, it wasn't long before the pests moved to new ground. The pumpkins that shaded the corn in the three sisters became sick shortly thereafter, and without any shade for its roots, the corn dried out earlier than it might have otherwise.

But before everything dried up, the custodians harvested many ears of corn and took them home to eat. And the Native American corn was beautiful, all different colors!

Please remember that even though the corn plants are dead now, it's worthwhile to remind the kids that each of those 10 or 12 foot plants that are still standing came out of one kernel of corn-- planted by a second grader!

A grand achievement! And we made some squirrels very happy!

What's Blooming Now?

Probably the most exciting thing happening in the garden right now is that the **cotton pods are starting to pop.** They are in the colonial garden and in the second grade garden.

As one third grader who was examining the cotton pod said: “I can’t believe this is my underwear!”

Here are some facts compiled by Miriam Miller that she shared with fourth graders last year. Your kids also might be interested:

- the seeds they planted last year were ancestors of the cotton used in Ancient Egypt and were also used at Mt. Vernon, George Washington’s estate
- cotton was planted along the James River why? (in order to transport it)
- cotton was a colonial cash crop and it is STILL one of the main cash crops in the US!
- harvesting cotton was very difficult because as the pod opens, the edges are very sharp - much like a holly leaf—they would make the slaves’ hands bloody and scarred at the end of just one long day
- the seeds are very difficult to pull out of the cotton –they are embedded so it’s like pulling hitchhikers out of your hair -- that’s the reason the cotton gin was such an important invention! Much less time was spent on this tedious task than ever before!

Right next to the cotton is okra, and if you can see the two plants in bloom together, you’ll notice their flowers are very similar. Cotton and okra are both members of the hibiscus family. Also, if you want to take any okra home, remember to harvest it while it’s small. Once it gets big, it’s too tough to eat.

SOL Mailbox

For the teachers who have a few extra minutes after lunch or on the way to a special, we have started an SOL mailbox to help people use the Discovery Garden even if they aren’t sure how. Please take a look at the SOL mailbox right outside the Discovery Garden doors. There are multiple activities which fulfill some SOLs for every grade, and many only take a few minutes!

Other Highlights!

- We have an almost fully completed compass rose, care of Anne Lawrence and her daughters! She has been hard at work putting the finishing touches on it. It is directionally accurate and everyone is amazed by her artistry! We are so lucky!
- We have a healthy, thriving worm bin, care of Elvira Jakovac. This will supply all the first grade teachers with as many worms as they will ever need. And if others would like to see composting in progress, open the bin!
- Desiree Jansob would like to organize a composting program at Stratford. Please let us know if you would be interested in helping start this program in our cafeteria.
- The K-kids purchased a solar water fountain with money they raised for the garden last year. Please come see if it works!
- Take care of the garden! We have had some vandalism this summer, both the pumpkins (before they died) and the kindergarten caterpillar rocks. Please keep an eye out in your community!

5 Senses Garden

The lemon balm and citronella geranium are both enormous and smell divine. There are flowers on the licorice mint. The basil is going to seed. Can you find the hen and chicks?

Colonial Garden

Remember in the colonial garden there is also lamb's ear, known as a colonial band aid partially because of its antiseptic properties, and rue, which has medicinal properties and was considered to be a reliable defense against witches!

Edible Garden

The beans, cucumbers, and squash have all been harvested, but there are still ripening tomatoes, tomatillos, lettuce, carrots, parsley, and more.

We have found three different kinds of caterpillars in the garden, several of them here! And they are gorgeous, colorful, and fat! And one is spiky!

Virginia Natives Garden

The black-eyed susans are bursting and there is endless pollination happening here and in the joe pye weed. Both the black-eyed susans and sunflowers have fed the goldfinches all summer.

We have also seen hummingbirds in the garden: watch closely and you might see them too!

Other Areas of Interest:

Purple Hyacinth Bean Covered Teepee– Watch as the vines creep up to create shelter.

Sunflower Peace Circle- By Ms. Meade's Young Scholars. We didn't have as much sun as we should have but you can still see the shape.

Thermometers– Read the different thermometers around the garden. What is the difference in the sun versus the shade? Compare how the different temperatures feel? Despite the varying temperatures, decide which one actually matches the temperature outdoors?

First Grade Garden– The wildflowers are getting close to when we will harvest the seeds for next year.

We hope that everyone will enjoy our outdoor classroom this year! Soon we will send out a date to stain the tables so that all our plants will get tucked in for winter.

Please let us know if you have any ideas, requests, or suggestions to make our Discovery Garden even better.

And if you would like more specific information on any of the gardens and/or grade level lesson plan ideas, please let us know.

Thank you,

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