

The Nueva Garden Provides Authentic (and Delicious) Learning

The Nueva Garden has been a pillar of the student experience since the founding of campus. It has provided a student-centered space for exploration and authentic discovery for thousands of students. When students enter the garden they are observing, asking questions, linking concepts, and collaborating. Students leave the garden more aware of connections between the seeds, soil, worms, pollinators, and vegetables and fruits they see at home. They are able to bring these experiences and observations back to the classroom, giving their studies authentic context.



The garden is a place for authentic scientific inquiry for our students in preK, kindergarten, and first grade.

Each Friday, fourth- through eighth-grade students participate in the Garden Academy, where they learn about agroecology and mentor younger students during Choice — a lower school tradition that allows students to follow their passions and discover new interests.



The olive trees adjacent to the garden have provided a home to the “forts” for decades. At the base of these trees, in the shade of their leaves, students have created structures, made new friends, and learned to navigate and resolve myriad conflicts using real-world SEL strategies. This fall, students were thrilled to harvest, sort, clean, brine, and package olives for the community to enjoy.

“Do worms have eyes?”

First-grade students explore this question during their unit on the five senses. After deep exploration, they learned that worms, in fact, have nerves that allow them to sense light and dark in order to navigate their soil-rich environment.

Students search for worms for the “vermicomposter” or “worm hotel.” Worms and food scraps are added to the vermicomposter and the compost that is created is then added to our garden beds.



“My hope is that, as students spend time in the garden, they begin to feel connected to everything around them. I want them to feel free to explore, ask questions, and make discoveries. I want them to begin to understand that everything in the world is interconnected — everything is science.”

— Lauren Fieberg (Garden Coordinator and Lower School Science Teacher)



Each Wednesday, students arrive at the garden, ready to harvest, prepare, and enjoy fresh vegetables. Harvest days provide an opportunity to try new foods, revisit old favorites, and combine ingredients in new and exciting ways. There is a spirit of teamwork and pride in being so closely connected with food they helped maintain and grow.



“A major theme of science in preK is close observation. The garden presents lots of opportunities for close observation that leads to new questions, experiments, and evidence-based hypothesis building, such as: What conditions nurture an acorn’s growth? Why did the bean seeds seem to grow so easily and the acorns have not even sprouted? Why isn’t our very developed mango seed sprouting?”

— Carolee Fucigna (PreK Teacher)



Kindergarten students preparing and bringing grape leaves to make dolmas.

Carolee and preK students walk through the garden on an exploration of corn and grasses, identifying the distinct parts of corn and comparing the crop’s similarities to other grasses.



Each day of the week, the garden is open to all students during recess. Lauren structures each day with a different theme: Art on Mondays, Soil Prep is on Tuesday, Harvesting and Taste Tests are on Wednesday, Composting on Thursday, and Planting and Propagation on Fridays.