

Sowing Seeds Of Good Health

It all Begins with Children



Passionate about teaching and motivating children to practice healthy lifestyles, Eisenhower Medical Center family physician Chris Flores, MD has volunteered at a number of Coachella Valley health fairs and educational events. He was also instrumental in helping create the local YMCA's "Y Be Fit" fitness and nutrition program. "I work with the YMCA because they are focused on children and obesity and offer a variety of childcare and after-school services. The Y Be Fit program was launched in underserved communities in Desert Hot Springs and Palm Springs, and then expanded throughout the valley," says Dr. Flores. "Through my YMCA and school contacts I learned there was talk of putting a garden in at Agua Caliente Elementary School in Cathedral City. Gardening provides a great teachable moment for kids to learn about food and nutrition, while being physically active outdoors, and I really wanted to be involved with that."

Dr. Flores worked with friend and teacher Cathy Liss and the local sustainable food organization Slow Food® to establish the garden in 2009. "It was fantastic and so much fun. The people at Slow Food helped coordinate and build the raised beds and provided information about what to plant. Some parents of the kids at the school work as contractors and landscapers, so they got involved with building the garden as well. It was like an old fashioned barn raising, between the volunteers, the kids and the parents, so it's a school garden but to a certain extent it is also a community garden," says Dr. Flores.

"Seeing the kids learn basic gardening skills and open their eyes to how food is grown and processed is very satisfying to me as a doctor, Not only do they increase their appreciation for fresh produce and respect for the agricultural process, they also gain self-esteem in raising a healthy food from seed to harvest with their own hands."
—Dr. Flores

The garden was created over the course of three weekends. The group even constructed a shed and the children put up scarecrows, complete with sombreros and palm frond heads. Sunflowers, pumpkins and watermelons are just some of the crops that have been planted. "Seeing the kids learn basic gardening skills and open their eyes to how food is grown and processed is very satisfying to me as a doctor," says Dr. Flores. "Not only do they increase their appreciation for fresh produce and respect for the agricultural process, they also gain self-esteem in raising a healthy food from seed to harvest with their own hands."

Plans are to sustain the garden and put in more beds. "They just put in a new small container for the kindergarten class and the compost bin is a big hit with the kids as well!" Dr. Flores believes the garden teaches kids lifelong skills that that will help them prevent diabetes, heart disease and stroke down the line. www.slowfooddesertcities.org/agua.html