

Octopus Garden History and Fun Facts



McKinley's Octopus Garden has a long history that began in 2007, when a dedicated group of McKinley parents, teachers, administrators, children and PTC Board members worked together to build the Garden, literally jack-hammering the hard soil to plant trees, constructing raised garden beds and arranging for well-known local artist Betsy Schultz to lead Mr Kenyon's 2nd graders in creating the Octopus mosaic. Many of our fruit trees were planted in those first few years.

- Local organization ARTS (A Reason to Survive) guided families to create other mosaic murals that surround the Octopus Garden, and later the tree mural near the parking lot and cafeteria.
- Other local organizations that donated to the Garden include: North Park Nursery, Thorn Street Brewery (when it was also a garden shop), Santos Coffee Shop and SD Ceramics Connection.
- Over the years, families have participated in campus beautification work-party events ('Green Days') that have continued to improve the school grounds and Garden by adding art, student-made tiles, and signage; building the shed and additional raised garden beds; and other Garden amenities including rain barrels.

Dig Down Deep Garden Educators (D3) was added to the Garden team in 2013, to integrate outdoor, hands-on science/garden education into the "Wheel" time that is provided for classroom teachers and IB collaboration. Over the years, D3 has adapted each year to slight variations in scheduling to support this program. In 2018, when 4th and 5th graders were not given Garden time in the Wheel, they wrote letters and petitioned the school to give them Garden time outside of Wheel collaboration.

- Dig Down Deep staff have over 25 years of experience in teaching gardening to children in an IB setting and maintaining a school garden.
- D3 also provides outdoor garden education at Birney, PB Elementary and Roosevelt Middle School (all IB schools) as well as Future Achievers Preschool at the Logan Heights CDC.

The McKinley Garden Program has evolved over the years from being primarily an after-school garden and cooking club with parent volunteers and occasional visits with classes, to a fully integrated part of the Wheel, providing weekly hands-on science to almost every McKinley student. The impacts of the Garden extend well beyond the Octopus Garden in many ways including:

- McKinley students' highly successful Cafeteria-to-Compost program was recently filmed by SDUSD as an example to share with other schools in the district. This program began in 2014 with support from D3, and has evolved from being parent-led to now including ALL students, with leadership opportunities for 4th and 5th graders who serve as the 'Compost Crew.'
- McKinley was certified in 2019 to harvest from our school garden and serve the fresh produce on the salad bar, as part of the District's "Garden to Cafe" program.

"The best fertilizer is the farmer's shadow." -unknown author

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At McKinley's Octopus Garden, students participate in a hands-on environmental and agricultural curriculum that integrates Next Generation Science Standards with McKinley-specific International Baccalaureate Units. These units teach students about gardening from seed to table, and support seasonal and cross disciplinary explorations that help maintain butterfly and pollinator habitat, investigate natural resources like water and native plants, and help students develop confidence in important organic gardening skills such as composting and plant propagation.

- McKinley students, guided by D3 educators, care for 5 fruit trees and 9 raised garden beds within the Octopus Garden. Near the bungalows, an additional 7 fruit trees and 6 beds are tended, primarily by the upper grades classes with support and guidance from D3.
- Our Garden is a living, breathing science lab, a space for physical and mental wellness. McKinley kids experience the value of teamwork as ALL students help the Garden grow: from creating compost and cultivating the soil, to planting seeds and nurturing the plants, and finally harvesting... sharing and enjoying the fruits of our labor!
- Within the D3 garden program, we make thoughtful connections to IB curriculum at each grade level including: 'how the world works' and thinking about life cycles and the food web; 'where we are in place and time' and how farming practices have changed over time; 'how we express ourselves' and the ways that nature can inspire us to be creative and take action to protect it. Each year, D3 takes time to carefully review and coordinate with classroom curriculum.

Research Shows that Students Involved in School Garden Programs:

- Have improved performance in science, math, language arts, and writing (Kate G. Burt, 2018).
- Increase their fruit and vegetable consumption, with some students consuming up to three additional servings per day (Morris & Zidenberg-Cherr, 2002).
- Exhibit improved self-esteem, teamwork skills, and responsibility (Skelly et al., 2013)
- Have improved perceptions of well-being, quality of life, and social and cultural cohesion (Kate G. Burt, 2018).

THE BOTTOM LINE

- Many schools would love to have a school garden but are never able to get it off the ground or build it to maturity.
- A garden is a living organism that cannot be stopped and started intermittently. It requires a steady hand and continuous care over time.
- Our Octopus Garden is not just another esteemed and beloved enrichment program. It is an outdoor garden-science classroom inherited from past generations of McKinley families and staff, and that we must show a commitment to maintaining over time.

“ We cannot protect something we do not love, we cannot love what we do not know, and we cannot know what we do not see. Or hear. Or sense.”

-Richard Louv, author of The Nature Principle: Reconnecting with Life in a Virtual Age