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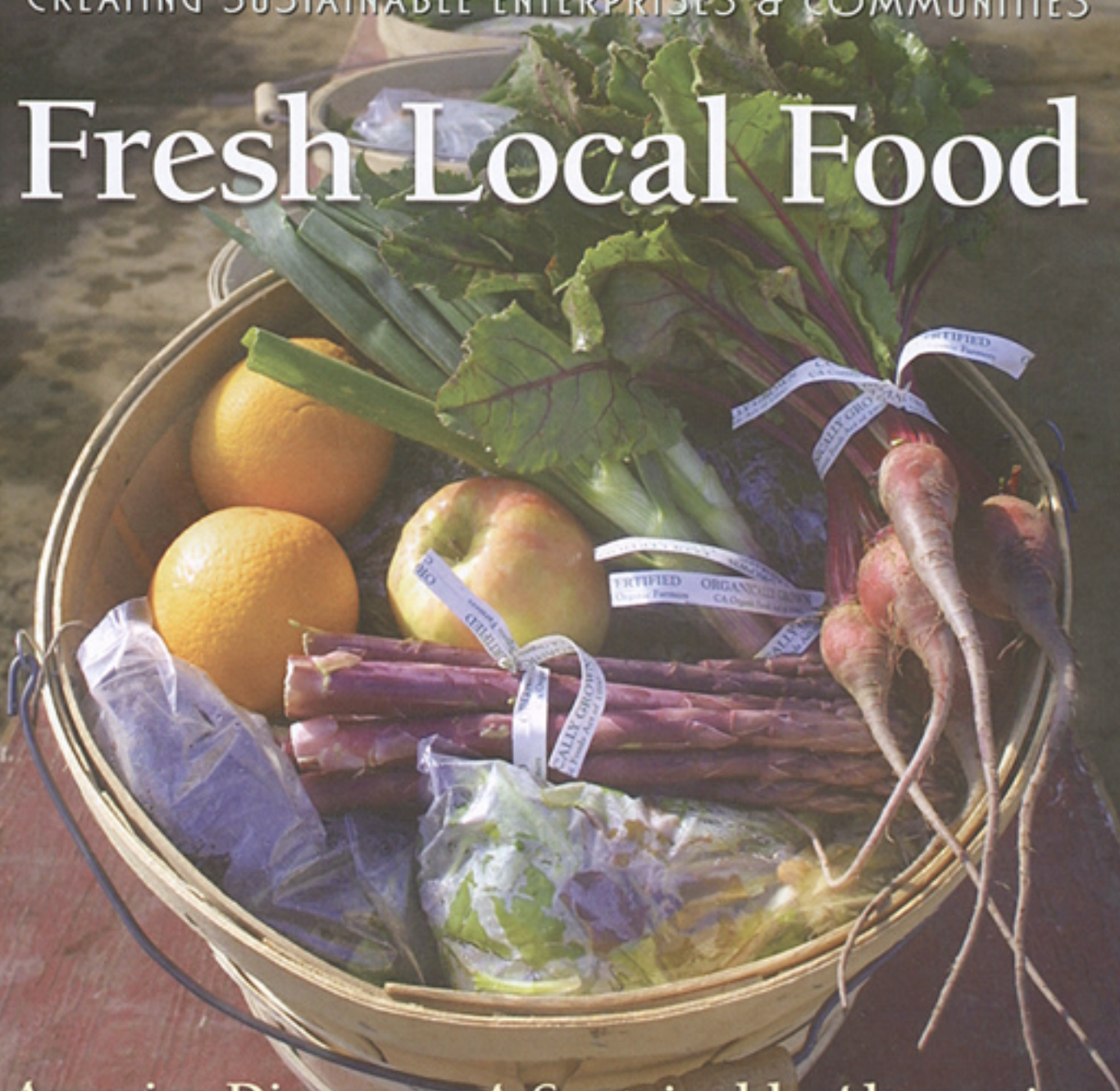
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The Edible Schoolyard Sets an Example

Unique project in California puts locally grown food on cafeteria tables and promotes an overall sense of well-being for students.

EVERYTHING from lettuce, kale and carrots to turnips, beets, fava beans, potatoes and corn is grown in the beds. Apples, cherries, plums, oranges and grapefruit, along with hazelnuts and figs grow on the schoolyard's trees. This is the home of the Edible Schoolyard — the Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School in Berkeley, California. The idea was conceived by owner/chef Alice Waters of the famous Chez Panisse restaurant in 1993.

vegetables on school grounds — and students preparing and eating the food — is now being used throughout the nation. The Edible Schoolyard has served as a model that is changing how school systems view food.

In Oakland, for example, Monarch Academy students grow fruits and vegetables in compost delivered by Norcal Waste System's Jepson Prairie Organics. "The school has a great program and we like being able to help out," says Norcal spokesman Robert Reed. "The compost is made from food residuals collected from Oakland restaurants. It's really a full-circle process."

In 1995, landscape artists, gardeners, teachers, chefs and

Collaborative who helped Waters start the Edible Schoolyard. The food is grown in compost made from organic residuals collected from local neighborhoods and restaurants.

FEEDING THE FUTURE

Berkeley is home to diverse ethnic neighborhoods that wander into each other as city blocks stretch on. Vegetables found in Mexico and South America are grown so students can eat ethnic dishes. Dishes are prepared so dietary requirements of any culture can be met. While not all dishes are vegetarian, there is a decided focus on serving meals based around fresh fruits and veg-



Monarch Academy in Oakland, California has modeled a food-growing program after the Edible Schoolyard — an idea conceived by owner/chef Alice Waters of Chez Panisse.



Waters frequently drove past the school on her way from home to the restaurant, and began to wonder what the extensive grounds might look like if there were a garden project at the school (in place of bare asphalt) covering the grounds with edible landscaping — orchards, grape arbors to sit under, groves of fruit trees and vegetable gardens producing food that could be used at the school. "I was trying to imagine a way to seduce kids into a whole new way of thinking about food," Waters recalls. The concept of growing fruits and

other professionals were asked to brainstorm designs for the free-form Edible Schoolyard garden. Later that year, the asphalt was torn up to make room for edible landscaping. Cover crops of bell beans, fenugreek, crimson clover and vetch were planted to enrich the soil until official edible plantings could take place. In 1997, planting began and cooking classes started up in May. "We have a beautiful free-form garden with all different shaped beds. We don't have a production garden," says Beebo Turman of the Berkeley Community Gardening

ables. "Sometimes the students make bean enchiladas. Another popular dish is a kale wrap. The program is not anti-meat, but meat is expensive and we really are pushing a vegetable diet," Turman says. "We really want to emphasize fruits and vegetables and whole grains — that's really important when we're talking about a generation of kids who consider french fries a vegetable — and

Food residuals from Oakland restaurants are composted and then used to grow fruits and vegetables at area schools.

it's the only vegetable they eat at that."

More than half of King school students are eligible for free or reduced lunch programs offered by the federal government. "This is the one good meal some of these students will get in a day," Turman says. During that meal, which is prepared by students, Garden Collaborative volunteers, teachers and program employees teach kids about the "Pleasures of the Table," affectionately named by Waters.

Because of the garden, and others like it throughout the nation, school lunches have become healthier all around. For example, the Child Nutrition Advisory Committee has been able to get certain foodstuffs off school menus for good in Berkeley. "The school board passed a food policy three



years ago that said we want fresh, organic, locally grown foods to be served as much and as often as possible. Now that it's in black and white, it's helping — and the gardens helped push that along," Turman says.

LESSONS FROM THE KITCHEN AND GARDEN CLASSROOMS

The garden allows students to gain hands-on experience planting different trees, vegetable plants, herbs and flowers. Work in the garden is done in teams of two to six members. At the start of class, students listen to a description of jobs that need to be done for the day and then choose which jobs they will do. "It's funny, kids in middle school don't usually like to get dirty, so in the beginning of the year they don't want to deal with the compost or planting things," Turman says. "But by the end of the year, a lot of students discover they feel very satisfied working in the earth."

A former garden manager and

teacher at the school, David Hawkins, says watching students learn to cooperate, the way they have to in the garden, is amazing and carries over to the traditional classroom setting. "It has been a moving experience to see a vacant weed patch, partly covered in asphalt, transformed by 900 eleven and twelve year olds in the course of several years into a beautiful fertile garden," says Hawkins. Moving compost to beds, digging beds, laying out drainage and irrigation systems, constructing trellises and pathways, growing and harvesting plants, and composting garden residuals all require cooperation. Turman says 80 to 90 percent of the students end up having a positive experience in the garden, pointing out that a lot of students have never played in dirt, much less watched anything good grow out of it. "They're playing as much as they're working and that's okay. So many kids never have the chance to be kids," Turman says. At the end of the class, students put their tools away and gather for a short period to learn what their fellow gardeners accomplished in the garden that day.

At the King school, each grade has different cooking class schedules and responsibilities. Sixth and seventh graders spend about nine weeks in the kitchen focusing on preparing staple foods from the cultures covered in their classroom curriculum. They learn the relationship of food to culture and the benefit of locally grown food, while cooking meals for the entire school. For example, students made the traditional bread used on Day of the Dead altars in Mexico in the classroom kitchen. The recipe allowed Mexican students to share part of their culture with the rest of the school. Study of cookbooks and maps help students understand the connection between local food and climate.

In the 12 schools of the Berkeley Unified School District, nine have gardens and of those nine, five have cooking classes. "The cooking classes are made possible largely in part through California Nutrition Network monies," Turman says. "The Edible Schoolyard, has its own coffers, and the others write for grants and scrounge until they can make ends meet." The Berkeley Garden Collaborative also oversees Youth Training Gardens that train and employ young people from high-risk neighborhoods. The Collaborative volunteers mentor the young people, sharing practical skills applicable to life and gardening. — A.S. □

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