

Seeds of Love: Children learn the art of gardening

BY DIANA PARKER

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With some help from small hands, sun, water and a higher power, children at Calvary Christian Academy hope to watch the garden they planted Friday blossom into a bounty of flowers and vegetables.

Students in kindergarten through sixth grade planted Gerber daisies, sweet basil, strawberries, Japanese eggplant, bell peppers and other flora in 10 4-by-7-foot raised beds beside the school.

Volunteers from Lowe's nursery department were on hand to teach students how to gently remove the plants from pots and smooth the dirt around the roots.

"This is all the parents' doing," said school Administrator Shannon Williams. "I'm just amazed. I had no idea it would turn out like this."



The "Seeds of Love" garden was the inspiration of Amanda Noble, whose 6-year-old son Forest Maddox is in kindergarten at the school.

Noble, who grew up in Havasu, developed an interest in gardening while living in Portland, Ore. When she returned to Havasu, she thought her gardening days were over.

"I was bummed out that we didn't have gardening in (Havasu), but when I found out our growing season here is basically September to June, I was inspired," she said.

She contacted Nina Brackett of the Arizona Cooperative Extension. Brackett recently was hired to coordinate a school gardening program in Mohave County. The Seeds of Love garden is the program's first project, and Brackett hopes it will serve as a model for other schools in the county.

The project came together in just six weeks, Brackett said. The materials, labor, soil and plants were donated by Calvary parents and local businesses.

"One of the goals of hands-on gardening is to give kids an interest in what's on the dinner table, so they won't say, 'Zucchini - yuck!'" Brackett said.

In addition to improving nutrition, gardening can be incorporated into the academic curriculum and support the learning of science, math and language arts, Brackett said.

The garden should be in full splendor by Mother's Day, when the children will be able to make bouquets for their moms from the flowers they grew.

The Mother's Day connection is appropriate, because Noble has dedicated the garden to her own mother, Nancy Graham, a former school nurse who died of breast cancer in July 2006.

"She loved kids and she also loved gardening," Noble said. "I wanted to do something to honor her."

The Seeds of Love garden is only the beginning, Noble said. The school is planning a move to a new 13-acre campus, and 3 acres of that will be set aside for a garden where Noble hopes to raise enough fruits and vegetables to feed the school.

"Amanda calls it brain food," Williams said.

You may contact the reporter at dparker@havasunews.com.