



Kids Thrive with Vegetable Gardening

Research shows that kids are more inclined to eat vegetables they grow themselves. In Minnesota, gardening classes are helping families to lower cancer risk.

VEGETABLE GARDENING is a way of life for residents of Austin, Minnesota – and a program for children there is keeping it going. Thanks to Hy-Vee grocery stores and the Austin Public Schools, “Sprouts – Get Out and Grow®” is teaching gardening, good nutrition and cooking to children ages 3-9.

The store’s Registered Dietitian, Jen Haugen, developed the program based on her own lifelong love for gardening. “There is such a great need to link fresh food to good health for children,” she says.

Growing Enthusiasm for Veggies

Haugen is planning the third year of classes that teach children how to grow vegetables, what health benefits come from eating them and how to turn them into yummy meals.

Last Spring, Haugen chose 19

vegetables that would produce a continuous yield of veggies throughout the summer.

“I didn’t expect them to get so excited about seeing things start to grow,” Haugen says. “When the cherry tomatoes came out early last year, the kids shouted when they saw them hiding under the leaves – they all wanted one.”

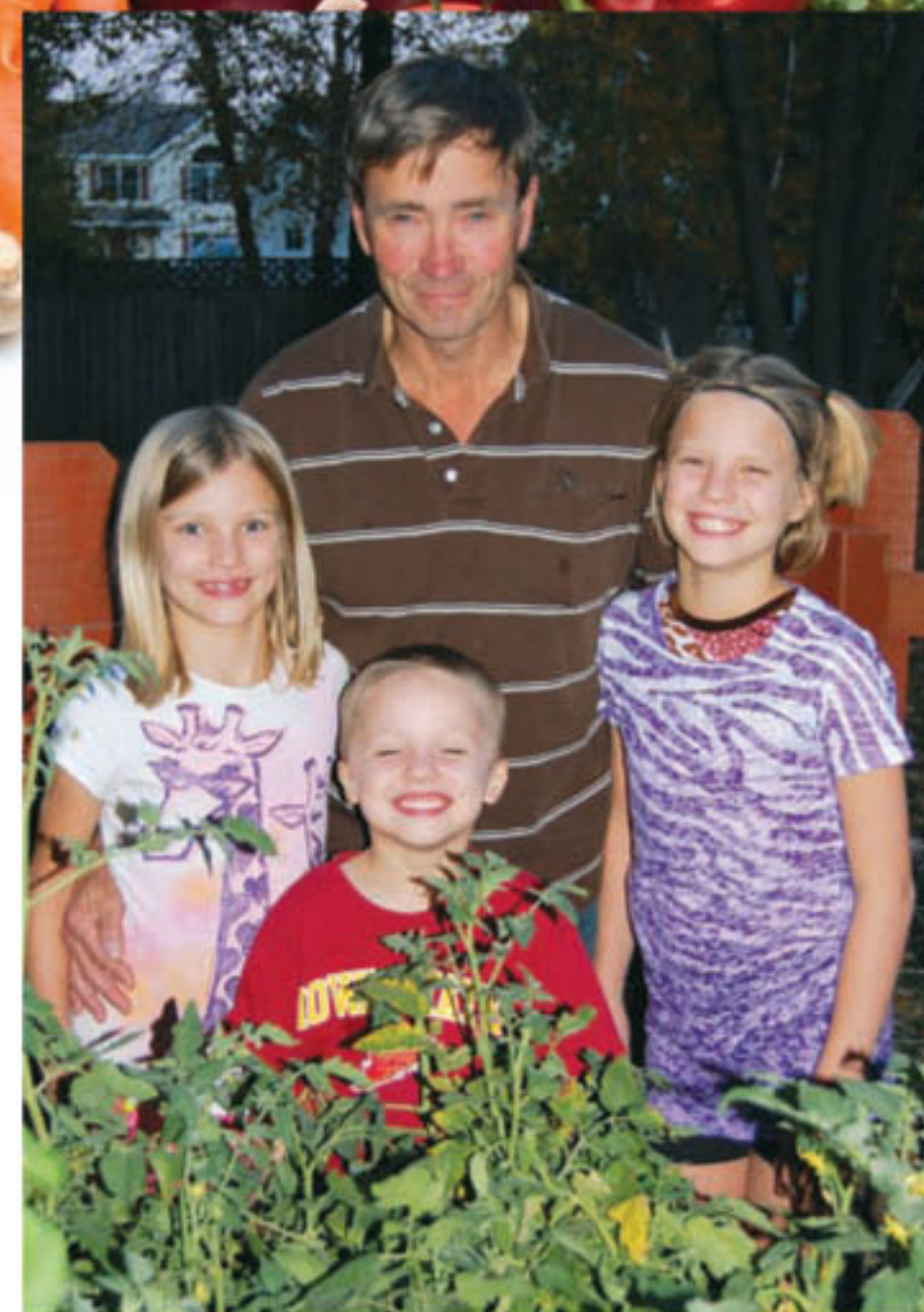
Darci Guanella’s children – Eleanor, 10, Natalie, 7, and Henry, 5 – went to some of the Hy-Vee classes. Their grandfather, Joe Guanella, has several gardens, she says.

“He’s been gardening most of his life. The kids always enjoy being out there with him.”

Joe gets the kids to help with planting, weeding and harvesting. “I try to get them involved as possible with all aspects,” he tells AICR.

“They look through seed catalogs to see what looks interesting. I try to have 2-3 new things each year with at least one of them being something you can eat straight from the plant.”

Mom Darci says, “They can be picky eaters, but they’ll eat almost anything that comes out of the garden. I’d seen Swiss chard



Grandpa Joe Guanella with (l to r): Natalie, Henry and Eleanor.

in the store and was gearing up to buy some, but I didn’t know how to prepare it,” she recalls.

“In the class, the kids grew, smelled, touched and tasted it, then they made quesadillas with it. Now they ask me, ‘Hey, remember those quesadillas with Swiss chard? Can we make that?’”



Scientists Add Health Facts on Veggies

Haugen invited scientists from the nearby University of Minnesota’s Hormel Institute to bring interactive lessons for the kids to the Hy-Vee garden. Last summer, kids learned to match different vegetables with the names of their cancer-fighting antioxidants. Hy-Vee is planning to start similar gardens at many of its other stores in the Midwest. As for the Guanellas, Joe has helped Darci start a garden at her own house for the kids.



Hy-Vee Sprouts students with Jen Haugen, MS, RD center rear.

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