

GOT DIRT? START A GARDEN!

Partnering on a gardening initiative to increase fruit and vegetable intake and physical activity

Public Health Problem

- Physical activity and healthy diet are essential for healthy weight and the prevention of many chronic diseases.
- Enjoyable activities like gardening may be a more desirable way for some adults and children to get recommended amounts of regular physical activity.
- Vegetable gardens are a source of healthy food, too, especially in urban environments where fresh produce in stores is often scarce.
- Gardening provides physical activity opportunities and is associated with higher intakes of fruits and vegetables by gardeners related to improved availability and more positive attitudes toward these foods.

Program

- The Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services created the Got Dirt? garden toolkit and partnered with the University of Wisconsin Extension Program to provide training and evaluate the kit's use, using funding from the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health's Wisconsin Partnership Fund.
- Providing cold frames in three locations was a strategy used to allow schools to initiate gardens as early as the end of February so vegetables could be harvested before the end of the school year rather than just during the summer growing season.
- The majority of training attendees were either childcare providers or childcare facility owners.

Impact

- Leveraged foundation funding of almost a half million dollars.
- Increased the number of gardens in school and child care sites and increased the number of cold frame gardens used to extend the growing season in Wisconsin's northern climate.
- Provided locally-grown vegetables for school and childcare center snacks and lunches and for use in lessons, for students to take home or as food pantry donations. Garden lessons helped students learn science, math and writing.
- Additional sites and training sessions will further increase the number of gardens at childcare sites and after-school programs and will include other personnel such as chefs, kitchen staff, and parents to enhance the promotion of healthy eating and physical activity.

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