

## **Lynchburg Grows helps James River Day School teach students how to plant and live**

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November 17, 2007

For years the greenhouse at James River Day School went practically unused, but today it's a hub of activity due in part to the help of Lynchburg Grows.

"It didn't seem like they were taking full advantage of the greenhouse," said James River Day School Head of School Mary Riser, who started in July.

"The use of it varied from year to year. It hadn't been used for a targeted project."

This year James River is partnering with the area environmental education center and farm to make the most of its facility. Students are learning about ecology, how to grow their own food and about developing healthy eating habits.

"It's a way for them to learn not only academics, but life skills," Riser said. "The experience is practical, memorable and meaningful, and that memory lasts longer."

The greenhouse, built during the 1999-2000 school year, has plenty of space for several plant beds, a workspace and fish tank. Sunlight filters in, casting a gentle glow over excited students tending to seedlings.

"It's a great way for our students to learn where vegetables come from," Riser said. Students need to realize vegetables don't just appear in the grocery store, she said.

The partnership with Lynchburg Grows gives students the opportunity to learn everything from science to community service, Riser said. Students plan to donate any extra vegetables grown to the Daily Bread, a nonprofit that provides food to the needy.

While the project is just getting started, Riser expects by the spring it will literally be in full bloom. Just outside James River Day School's greenhouse are four plant beds, some already brimming with colorful foliage.

Later this year kindergarten students will create an alphabet garden, which has a different plant for each letter of the alphabet, and fourth-grade students will plant a Colonial herb garden to go along with lessons on Colonial Williamsburg.

Riser said the idea of seeking help from Lynchburg Grows was a natural connection. They partner with many area schools to teach students about the environment and James River had the facilities to make the undertaking work.

"Because we have the resources, it's so easy to do," she said.

Scott Lowman, Lynchburg Grows director of stewardship, agreed.

"The partnership for the moment, most of what they're talking about right now, is the greenhouse project," he said. "They have a state-of-the-art greenhouse that hasn't been used in several years."

Lowman said Lynchburg Grows is helping students by working with them to prepare the greenhouse and plant seeds.

"That's what we do on a large scale here," he said.

So far, students have planted peas, tomatoes and they're beginning to use the fish tank in the greenhouse for an "aquaponic" system.

Using aquaponics, the fish tank and the plant beds form a closed ecosystem, Lowman said, where water from the tank and fish waste are used to irrigate and fertilize soil for the plants.

Students working in the soil, getting their hands dirty, will learn and hopefully remember a critical lesson - food doesn't come from a cellophane wrapper or plastic bag.

"It's important mainly because they need to know where their food comes from," he said. "It influences kids to eat healthy more than anything does."