



How does their garden grow? Nine-year-old raspberry pickers (above) give it good marks. Fourth-grade nutrition students (left) transform apples they've raised into fruit leather. Other students (below) collect seeds, double-dig. Each class is responsible for two 4- by 20-foot plots



NORMAN A. PLATE

They study science in their garden

The outdoor classroom: does it work? Green Acres School in Santa Cruz, California, answers "yes!" And students' scores, on standard achievement tests, support the endorsement.

This school's outdoor program is called Project Life Lab. Born of a 1970s enthusiasm for schoolyard gardening, it has produced a garden-based science curriculum other schools can easily adopt.

Setting for this learning laboratory is a 3-acre garden—formerly a packed-dirt parking lot—right on the school grounds. Besides plots like those you see above, it includes a solar greenhouse, an open-air kitchen, a recycling center, chicken coop, 4-H barn, orchard, a nature-study pond, and a science museum.

Every third-, fourth-, and fifth-grader

spends one class a week in the garden studying science, nutrition, or horticulture. In one year, a youngster might, among other things, sow seeds in flats; plant a tree; water, pick, and cook vegetables; raise baby chicks; help build a pond; analyze soil to see what compost or fertilizer it needs; work on a solar oven (and bake in it); and prepare a dozen garden-grown snacks.

A federal grant funded the pilot program for its first three years. The school district now pays two big costs: a teacher-director's salary and basic operation expenses (these are about \$1,500 a year).

Outside help, though, is essential: local businesses support the program by donating money, materials, and labor to build special projects such as the greenhouse

and barn; two private foundations pay part-time salaries; and college students and other volunteers contribute their time and expertise. A nonprofit group called Friends of the Harvest helps finance the garden and assists other schools in setting up similar learning centers.

You can order the three-volume *Growing Classroom* curriculum (it also tells how to establish—and fund—a school garden) directly from Life Lab; cost is \$30, plus \$3 for shipping. Visitors are welcome by appointment, and in April there will be three training workshops for teachers.

To preregister or to request more information, write to Friends of the Harvest, Project Life Lab, 966 Bostwick Lane, Santa Cruz, Calif. 95062, or telephone (408) 476-0319. □