

Plant a garden to grow your kids' desire for vegetables and fruit, new study suggests

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If you are looking for a way to encourage your children eat their fruits and vegetables, search no further than your backyard, suggests new Saint Louis University research.

Preschool children in rural areas eat more fruits and vegetables when the produce is homegrown.

"It was a simple, clear finding," said Debra Haire-Joshu, Ph.D., director of Saint Louis University's Obesity Prevention Center and a study author. "Whether a food is homegrown makes a difference. Garden produce creates what we call a 'positive food environment.'"

Researchers interviewed about 1,600 parents of preschool-aged children who live in rural southeast Missouri. They found that preschool children who were almost always served homegrown fruits and vegetables were more than twice as likely to eat five servings a day than those who rarely or never ate homegrown produce.

The American Dietetic Association recommends between five and 13 servings of fruits and vegetables a day.

In addition, children who grow up eating fresh-from-the-garden produce also prefer the taste of fruits and vegetables to other foods, the parents told researchers.

The study, in the April issue of the Journal of the American Dietetic

Association, found the garden-fed children were more likely to see their parents eating fruits and vegetables.

A greater variety of fruits and vegetables – more tomatoes, cantaloupe, broccoli, beans and carrots – also were available in the homes of families who nearly always had homegrown produce.

The implications of the research are important because they point to a simple way of getting kids to eat healthier, Haire-Joshu said. Plant a garden or encourage your school to do so.

"When children are involved with growing and cooking food, it improves their diet," Haire-Joshu said. "Students at schools with gardens learn about math and science and they also eat more fruits and vegetables. Kids eat healthier and they know more about eating healthy. It's a winning and low-cost strategy to improve the nutrition of our children at a time when the pediatric obesity is an epidemic problem."

Source: Saint Louis University

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