

Growing Environmental Stewards One Student at a Time

- UC Master Gardener Program of Sonoma County
- Youth Education Field Trip Program, Nokhnoma Teaching and Demonstration Garden*
- Pat Decker, Youth Education Program Lead (patjanedecker1@gmail.com)
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During a school field trip at Nokhnoma Teaching and Demonstration Garden,* Sonoma County Master Gardener Missy Sleight teaches students how to safely chop fruit and veggies to feed our worms. Photo credit: Sonoma County Master Gardener Clio Tarazi.

Introduction

Out of the ashes of the 2020 Glass Fire

Nokhnoma Teaching and Demonstration Garden* in Santa Rosa is located on ancestral land of the Wappo tribe. Our volunteers restored the site as a vibrant outdoor classroom serving the youth of Sonoma County.

Master Gardener volunteers provide free half-day field trips in spring and fall during the school year, primarily to Title 1 schools in underserved communities from Transitional Kindergarten through third grade. Field trips include bus transportation.

Other youth education programs at the garden include a summer field trip program for abused teens from the Valley of the Moon Children's Center, and an annual Children's Jamboree.

*Formerly Los Guilicos Demonstration and Teaching Garden.



Above: A field trip student pretends to be a squash in a Four Sisters Garden skit. **Upper right:** Sonoma County Master Gardener Kathy Matonak shows students how to plant a seed in a little coir pot to take home and grow. **Lower right:** Students work together to create a miniature Wappo village. Photo credit: Sonoma County Master Gardener Clio Tarazi.



Our mission

Our mission is to grow environmental stewards one student at a time. We believe all children, regardless of race, color, creed or gender, deserve to relax and enjoy the garden as a place to learn by exploring habitats, planting and seeing how things grow, and understanding where food comes from.

How we make it happen

Students rotate through six stations in the garden. Each station has activities and fun-based learning to keep students engaged and interested in learning new things. Props, skits, songs, games and scavenger hunts are key components. Volunteers teach six 30-minute modules:

- **Indigenous history:** Students construct a miniature Wappo village with plants, animals, food sources, and shelter.
- **Vermiculture:** Students make bedding for worms, chop up food to feed them, and learn about their anatomy using props and a student journal.
- **Food gardening:** Children pretend to be corn, beans, squash and sunflowers in the garden, plant seeds in a small pot, learn how roots develop, and plant seeds in our garden for a "hands-in the dirt" experience.
- **Pollination and parts of a flower:** Students play a guessing game with props to identify pollinators, peer at flowers with magnifiers, and explore the garden to find the male and female parts of flowers!
- **The five senses:** Students sing a song about how we use our five senses and scavenge in the garden for plants that exemplify each sense. Students write their findings in the student journal.

Gratitude Banners: Field trips end with a joyful parade of students' hand-written gratitude banners mounted on a pole in the garden. The banners express the students' thankful wishes.

Our field trip program is scalable and portable. Single modules are "suitcased" to schools, organizations, and events across Sonoma County. Our success depends on two critical factors:

1. An experienced, talented, and dedicated team of volunteers. All of us are retired teachers and/or experienced field trip practitioners.
2. Free bus transportation funded by a sustaining annual donation from a Master Gardener donor through an IRA account.

Results

Fall 2024 – Spring 2026:

- 761 students
- 57.8% Hispanic students
- 95.6% Title 1 students
- 100% of teachers likely to recommend field trip
- 100% of schools return for a field trip

Student testimonials

"I learned worms have five hearts."
"I loved the scavenger hunt and how soft the lamb's ears are."
"I remember flowers have male and female parts!"
"I learned that Wappo shelter was like upside-down bird nests."

Teacher testimonial

"What a wonderful hands-on experience for all! The field trip was well organized, and students enjoyed each station and learned many new and wonderful things! I also appreciated the native people's connection to our local community. Knowing the past is important."