



Background

80% of our children are not eating enough vegetables, with a third eating less than one portion a day. Perhaps the most alarming statistic is that 50% of parents say they have given up trying. Our mission is to inspire kids to veggie loving habits they will share with their parents today and their own children tomorrow.

We all know the background issues of childhood obesity, coupled with poor fruit and vegetable consumption. However, we believe that if we can teach primary school aged children to have a positive relationship with healthy food, it will grow and empower them with all of their food choices, their own dietary health and provide an understanding of how their food is produced.

Introduction

We have a future vision for an integrated programme of food education in primary schools which will act as a blueprint across all nations of the United Kingdom. As part of this plan, we want to include the joy of growing. We piloted our first growing project in Edinburgh in April 2022. The concept of the project was all about the journey of the delicious tomato fruit from seed to fork, designed to be a fun and educational adventure for the children.

Why a growing project?

Research shows that growing vegetables is constructive for many reasons and that children are more likely to try the food they have helped to grow. In addition, encouraging engagement and bonding with the vegetable creates agency and a pathway to consumption. Learning all about



how we grow food is not just good for children in terms of encouraging healthy eating, it's important to develop their understanding of the food chain, climate, sustainability and our environment. Children learn by getting stuck in and getting their hands dirty! So, involving them in a growing project is ideal for their development. We believe it is essential that all programmes end with a child trying a vegetable.

Pilot project in Edinburgh

In 2022, Veg Power teamed up with Edinburgh Community Food to pilot a pioneering growing project to get children interested and learning all about growing and eating food. Over 5,000 kids across 38 schools embarked on an adventure to grow their own delicious tomatoes from seed to fruit. This was a fantastic collaboration together with schools, community gardens and families.



Each primary school received 'grow packs' which included propagators, seeds and compost. Every child also received a Grow Strong wall chart with QR codes that gave access to a website to help them grow their tomato plants and learn more about related topics such as seed germination, tomato growing in space and food waste. Former Blue Peter gardener, Chris Collins, joined in the fun by growing his own tomato plant and provided plenty of tips and vlogs to help guide the little growers and their grown-up helpers. Chris said, "**there is nothing like seeing the miracle of a tiny seed emerge from the soil, grow, bloom and produce fresh food. When you have grown once, you will want to grow for a lifetime. Knowing how to grow food is not just amazing fun, it's also a life skill and one our children should not be without.**"

The children planted their tomato seeds in school and took their seedlings home to care for over the summer break, following their progress on a reward chart and sticker pack. The children repotted their plants at the end of the summer term using recycled yoghurt tubs and milk jugs as pots. This part of the growing process helps children learn skills, patience and responsibility. Opportunities like this provide interaction with food which further encourages them to eat a larger variety of food.

For the final stage of the project, at the start of the new school term, the tomatoes were harvested and the children, along with school caterers, cooked a tomato pasta sauce with their produce.

Last year, Edinburgh Community Food hosted Veg Power and Broughton Primary School where the little chefs brought in their homegrown tomatoes and helped Jeff Bland and George McIvor of Masterchefs of Great Britain prepare courgettes, carrots and celery and extra tomatoes to create a delicious tomato sauce.

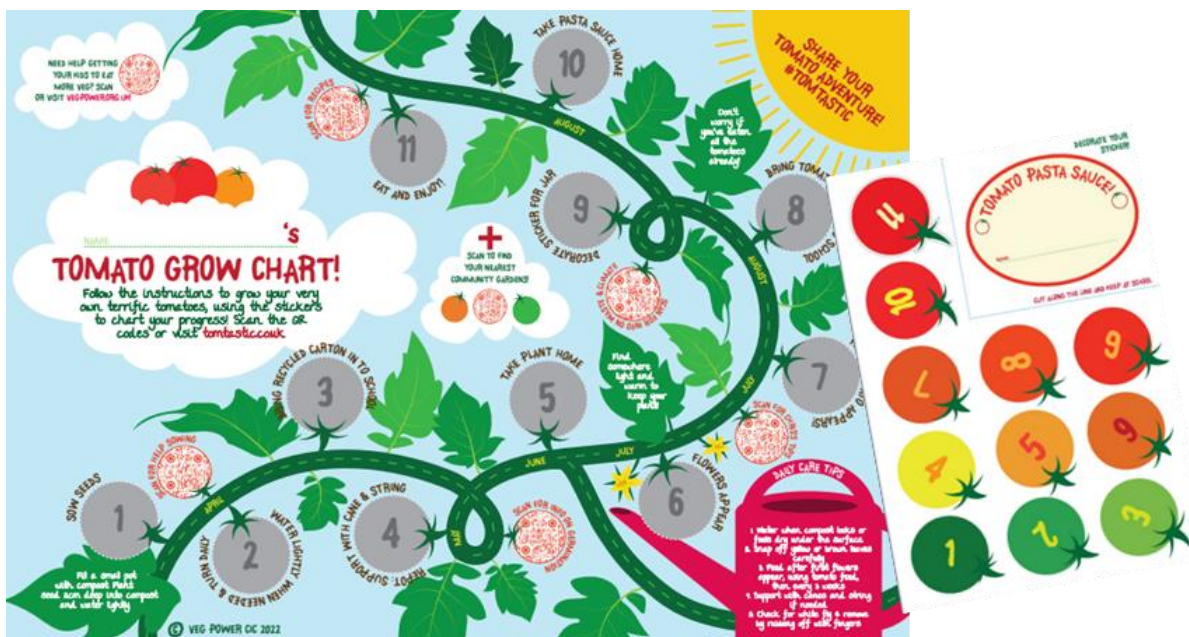


Margaret Pinnock, Outdoor Learning Teacher at Carrick Knowe Primary said the project “gave us the resources to allow a large number of children to grow a plant and take it home. It also gave us sufficient fruit to harvest and cook with the entire school of 12 classes. It would’ve been a much more scaled back version if we hadn’t been involved in Grow Strong and cooking wouldn’t have happened at all. It really snowballed and grew legs.”

What makes our growing project different?

At Veg Power our mission is to get children eating more vegetables - we use play and creativity to inspire and empower children to make positive food choices. Our growing project has been designed by our behaviour change experts in partnership with educators, botanists, entertainers and gardeners to deliver these differentiating goals:

1. **It’s all about eating.** The project’s purpose is to give children the sense of ownership and agency, so they want to eat the produce...that’s why we are renaming this project Growing to love...
2. **Extending the programme into the home.** Making sure it can extend into any home is an essential part of giving the child strong agency over the plant and its crop and helps to build the parent or carers confidence to serve those vegetables.
3. **Amazing assets.** We invest in creating assets for the children of the highest standard, as we know it is key to their engagement. Such as our tomato vine wall chart with ever ripening stickers and scannable QR codes.
4. **Teacher friendly.** Our 2023 programme comes with everything you need in a box delivered to your door. That includes a step-by-step guide with additional lesson plans plus a timed delivery of the repotting compost, so teachers don’t have to lug one into school.



Growing to love....tomatoes 2023

We propose to implement tomato growing projects in classes (suitable for years 1-5) in primary schools, running from April - September 2023, to coincide with optimal growing times and school holidays. We have chosen tomatoes as not only are they a delicious fruit that are easy and simple to grow at home, outside or on a windowsill, but they have a wonderful story for the children as they progress from seeds, to leaves, to flowers and to fruit, which ripens providing both narrative



and sensory stimulation. It's a story every child enjoys, and that's what gives them the powerful sense of ownership.

Please note, we intend to extend this to a wider range of vegetables in 2024 and beyond.

Each school will receive resources for 32 children including tomato seeds, windowsill propagators, compost and plant food from Unwins Seeds, as well as teachers guides and packs for all children created by us. Our partners Unwins, are part of Westland Group, the largest supplier of gardening products in the UK. Their team of botanists ensure we have the best seeds, equipment and advice to support young growers. Their industry-leading e-commerce and distribution centre ensures that the right assets are delivered at the right time with full customer support as required. Their generous support is invaluable to develop this project to the highest standards.

Children will sow their tomato seeds in school and after approximately 6-8 weeks re-pot them (in a recycled yoghurt pot, carton etc to highlight recycling and sustainability). The children can then take their plants home to continue the growing process on their windowsills, balconies or gardens over the summer holidays.

After the summer term, there will be plenty of flexible options and suggestions around what to do with the tomatoes. For example, children can eat their tomatoes at home or bring them back to school in September and show their harvest to their class. Schools will have the option to give lessons around sensory education or turn the tomatoes into hot or cold meals with the help from caterers or parent volunteers which can then be eaten at lunchtime or taken home. Or perhaps invite a local community group in to be shared and eaten together. This stage will be flexible to schools, based on what feels comfortable to them.

If possible, we suggest that schools reach out to parents, volunteers and/or community gardens to assist schools and children with the three main parts of this project:

1. Initially sowing the seeds in April
2. Re-potting their plants in recycled pots 6-8 weeks later
3. Cook along next term (if this is the decided route)

Resources

Each child will receive a progress chart and sticker pack to take home and follow the journey of the tomato plant. The stickers will highlight when certain landmarks have been completed such as 'sowing the seed', 're-potting the plant', 'seeing the first flower' etc. The chart will also have QR codes which will link to fun and educational content, in addition to activities and jokes etc.

As this is all about the kids having fun whilst learning where their food comes from and trying tomatoes at the end. This project puts children centre stage as they perform the pivotal role of nurturing the tomato plants along their growing journey. The progress chart is specifically designed to act as the child's 'mission control' bringing together every part of the journey with stickers which help track the seed to harvest, and integrated digital components to add depth and discovery to it. We will create a dedicated webpage for resources, downloads and content which can be used to support the schools, children and parents along the way.



We will provide a teacher's guidebook with a practical guide to growing, teaching resources, lesson plans in support of growing, all with the plant at the centre of different learning opportunities, worksheets and an assembly.

Costs

The cost is £100 per box, with enough resources for one class of approximately 30 children with some spare resources included. In 2023 we would like this programme in 50-100 schools as we develop from our initial successful pilot in Edinburgh to a scalable and affordable solution for schools. We are asking our local authority and catering partners and the network of growers who support Veg Power to fund a handful of schools in their community.

Timeline

Nature gives us a fairly fixed timing; seeds need to be planted in April and we'd most likely harvest at the beginning of September term.

Social Media and competition

We will also have a social media campaign with a unique hashtag so that children can share their progress and inspire others. We may include a competition when completing an evaluation survey or sharing their growing experiences on social media. Veg Power will supply a prize.

More information:

Pictures and videos: <https://vegpower.org.uk/growing-to-love/>

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