



Exploring a Green World



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Wisconsin

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Green.

That's the color, and concept, I keep coming back to as I reflect on my time with AmeriCorps Farm to School. The word "green" can be combined with so many things to elicit a variety of meanings. There are two that describe me in my role: green thumb and greenhorn. Being an avid plant lover and degreed botanist, any chance to educate others on the wonders of the floral world is an opportunity I relish. Yet despite this not being my first time as an educator or an AmeriCorps member, serving in K-12 schools has been a steep learning curve. Getting a first-hand look at what our teachers go through day after day has been a humbling experience; especially so during a time of curriculum changes and an attempt to return to pre-pandemic-style education. Luckily, having the opportunity to educate students in the gardens gives a sense of much-needed freedom to the lessons allowing students to learn in conjunction with elements of play in an outdoor space.

More abstractly, two other "greens" that I keep thinking about are: evergreens and greenhouses. In botany, evergreens are plants that maintain their lush, green needles throughout the seasonal changes. This resilience is due to morphological adaptations. They require fewer nutrients and water to produce their needles than the deciduous tree's broad leaves, not to mention that they allow for a longer photosynthetic season and are more resistant to damage. Yet, when it comes to food production, the majority of our farming in Wisconsin relies on foods that would require greenhouses or certain seasons to produce viable fruits and vegetables. Obviously, this is due to the innate seasonality of our region and the fact that people would be hard pressed to live on pine nuts and evergreen needle teas for months on end. Additionally, the winter doesn't bring an end to food storage or transportation of various fresh greens. But still, the idea that we rely so heavily on crops which can have such fleeting lives and require more maintenance than some of their evergreen relatives, is really a beautiful thing. It's easy to see why harvest festivals and the advent of autumn can be such a wonderful time, because it allows us to appreciate abundance while we have it, instead of taking it for granted.



That's why I deeply appreciate my role in Farm to School. Despite the challenges, it has allowed me to develop my skills further and appreciate looking at the botanical world through the eyes of the children who are seeing everything for the first time. They get to experience tracking a seed from its first planting to the harvest to collection of new seeds, and find joy in the fleeting. In some ways, our time in the garden allows an extension of that summer feeling: the warm sunlight on our faces, the scent of dirt surrounding us, and a keen eye ready to uncover the secrets of the natural world – perhaps a perfectly ripe tomatillo awaits or a wiggly worm emerging from rich, dark dirt or maybe a turkey feather left on the ground and forgotten by its owner and ready to incite imaginations. Even though I may be a greenhorn of an educator, I am also an evergreen observer equally excited to explore this green world.