



# Planting Seeds to Grow New Ideas

## *Catherine Masters*



The second quarter of my service as an AmeriCorps Farm to School Specialist has provided new challenges and has operated at a different tenor than the first quarter. I had the experience of starting in new classrooms and trying to engage students in garden programming while it was snowy and 7 degrees out. I have worked with classes who had no interest in learning about new foods, trying new things, or showing interest in gardening. I have also had the chance to deepen my relationships with other classrooms, and see the months of garden education come to fruition in the minds and interests of the scholars, even if not yet so in the garden.

I've had the opportunity to answer deep and interesting questions posed by 3rd graders and 5th graders on how nutrition works in our bodies, and how nutrients move from the soil into plants and then into us. I've watched students try bell peppers and bananas for the first time and realize that they love them. I've had students ask for extra copies of our meal planning activity because they'd like to work on them at home with their families. I've had students break into groups of their own volition and carefully, fastidiously, plan garden beds according to the resources provided to them to help them think like actual gardeners.

I've held a personal philosophy for sometime now that new ideas are introduced into minds just as seeds are planted in a garden. Oftentimes you plant them with no real promise that they will grow into anything. Just as seeds need the right conditions to grow, so do ideas; they need to be planted in the right environment, and given the right care, and only then will they germinate. Sometimes they don't germinate when you expect them to; sometimes the conditions need to alter in ways that are not clear to you but innate in the seed.

It is entirely too easy to apply this philosophy to my work as a Farm to School Specialist and garden educator. It is important to plant seeds, because without this imperative first step, nothing will grow. You can do what you can to make sure the conditions are just right to encourage growth. Some seeds grow more easily than others—there are blooms that are more precious because they are fastidious in their growing conditions. However there are so many factors that can only be left to the universe.

Some of my students come from families that struggle to get food onto the table. Their caregivers simply cannot make fresh fruits and vegetables a priority, however much they might like to. Some families don't have regular access to whole grains, low-fat dairy products, and lean proteins. The pressure to buy local isn't as pressing as the need to take care of their children the best they can. My efforts to educate in these circumstances can feel dwarfed by the human need to tend to one's families in difficult times.

However, I can provide the families and students with resources. I can share my informed thoughts and feelings on the importance of eating healthy, and the joy of growing food. At some point in their lives, maybe even right now, they could prioritize the information from my lessons. They could use the resources I provide or research on their own the ways of growing apartment tomatoes. They could weed with their grandparents at a community garden, or become really involved with our school garden. Or perhaps, years from now, they could decide to try out gardening because there's something deep in them, planted as a child, that tells them it would be good not only for their bodies, but also their hearts and minds, to get their hands in the soil. Afterall, that's what happened to me.

In the meantime, I will do what I can to serve the students and their families with all of our limited resources and good intentions. Difference is not made only by serving those who are ready for change. Sometimes it works much more slowly and patiently than that. Sometimes you're planting radishes and other times you're planting apple trees.