



Background

80% of our children are not eating enough vegetables, with a third eating less than one portion a day. 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 piloted a national growing project in April 2023, reaching 170 schools across Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England, with 11,000 children taking part and growing their own tomatoes from seed to fruit. The concept of the project was all about the journey of the delicious tomato, designed to be a fun and educational adventure for the children.

Why a growing project?

We want kids to love vegetables. One of the best ways to develop that love is through growing your own. 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.

Growing Kits...

Each primary school received 'growing kits' which included propagators, tomato seeds, organic plant feed, plant labels and compost. Each child also received a Growing To Love...Tomatoes wall chart and sticker pack with QR codes that gave access to an exclusive website to help them grow their tomato plants and learn more about related topics such as seed germination, photosynthesis and food waste. Teachers received a 24 page guide to help them along the journey.



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 re-potted 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 the tomatoes were harvested and the children had the option to eat their tomatoes at home with families or take them back to school for a show and tell lesson or make homemade pasta sauce with caterers.

Val, Teacher at Southwold Primary said.... *"We loved taking part and the children enjoyed watching their tomato plant grow. Their favourite bit was when they started to produce fruit and I had lots of tomatoes that had grown over the summer holidays come in on the first day back to show and share with me! The kits were beautiful, and the children loved planting the seeds, watering them and then taking them home to continue to look after and grow."*

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 named 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/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 programme has everything included in a box and delivered straight to the school door, including a step-by-step guide with additional lesson plans. We are partnering with an award winning headteacher to ensure there are curriculum based components of the growing project.



Growing To Love....Tomatoes 2024

2024 will be bigger and better, with some famous faces and much loved characters, including Shaun the Sheep, former Blue Peter gardener, Chris Collins and kids CBBC presenter Sam Nixon helping the kids along their growing journey.

We propose to implement our tomato growing project from April - September 2024 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 2025 and beyond.

Each box contains resources for approximately 32 children per class. The kit will include tomato seeds, windowsill propagators, compost and plant food from Westlands/Unwins Seeds, as well as a teachers guide and resource 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 in April 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.

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 on our website with inspiration, tips and resources including related arts and craft projects and a digital flyer to send to parents.

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 have a dedicated webpage for resources, downloads and content which can be used to support the schools, children and parents/carers' along the way.

We provide a teachers' 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. 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.

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.