

Dresden Ag Students Learn Horticultrual Skills

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News Writer

Dresden High School's agriculture classes are not just for future farmers. It also teaches valuable skills useful for when they become homeowners, such as home gardening and landscaping.

Those ag students that plan to have a farm of their own someday, learn about many aspects of farming, including crop rotation, soil conservation, planting strategies to maximize production, and other aspects of the agri-business industry.

In the area of home, lawn and gardening, students gain hands-on experience when it comes to:

vegetable and flower gardening, lawn care, landscaping, small engine repair, and basic electrical and plumbing techniques.

According to Ag Shop Teacher Jason Kemp, there are 22 students in his greenhouse class, which is just two less than total capacity.

"What we try to do in the greenhouse is teach students how to plant and care for their

seeds, and transplant them to separate containers when they grow large enough. Also, some of the slower-growing plants are purchased as plugs and raised to garden-planting size. Additionally, they learn how to take their skills home and plant their own gardens, which we encourage."

He stated some of the plants the students raise and transplant into larger pots as they get bigger include: various types of tomatoes (Better Boy, Jet Star, Red Cherry, Kellogg), peppers (California Wonder, Cyanine, Jalapeño), squash, cantaloupes, and other popular garden varieties.

The students also raise flowers, which the class sells in 10-inch hanging flower baskets and ceramic flowerpots.

"They get in the soil and get their hands dirty and learn something," Mr. Kemp said.

"Around the greenhouse, we'll till the soil where there used to be flower beds and plant vegetables, so they'll learn how to prepare the soil to grow food. Throughout the summer, they can come up here and get what they want. We do this because they may not have a place or the tools to do this at home."

Mr. Kemp stated, once the vegetables are approximately six to eight inches tall, they will be sold on Saturdays from 8:00 a.m. until noon at Dresden Farmers Market, until they are all gone. He said this should take no longer than two to three weeks, but they have up to six weeks if needed. The booth will be operated by ag students working one-hour shifts, which will be part of their grade.

"We're not really doing this to try to make any money," Mr. Kemp said. "But if we can just get some of our costs back and break even, then that's okay. The main thing is to teach the kids public relations, so they'll learn to say 'yes mam,' 'no mam,' 'yes sir,' 'no sir,' 'let me get that for you' — just everyday manners that we have to have. The students know everything about the plants. They can answer questions about them. They can instruct customers how to care for them, how to plant them, and which plants need to be planted in the shade or full sun. The kids are always excited when they're asked about what they've done concerning the plants."

"Also, if I have any FFA students who have a truck patch or vegetable garden and have extra food they want to bring to Dresden Farmers Market to sell, the money they make off that is theirs to keep. So, that will generate a little money for them," Mr. Kemp said.

He stated, last year, a couple of FFA student rented their own space next to Dresden High School's ag booth and they sold everything they brought to the market.

"The customers always brag on the kids about how polite and well-mannered they are, and what a good job they do," Mr. Kemp said.

"This year, the ag students have agreed to provide enough flowers to help decorate for graduation services to cut down on costs."

"Sherry Smethwick works with the students at Dresden Elementary and Middle School," he added. "Last year, she brought several students to the greenhouse in the evenings to teach them about gardening. This helps get the students started young in life. Without agriculture, where would be? - naked and hungry."

Mr. Kemp also teaches ag shop, which mostly involves woodworking and metal fabrication. Woodworking techniques, such as basic construction and finish work, are incorporated into class projects. One of the more popular projects is a deer blind, which have floors, walls and roofs — just like a house. The students also build planter boxes.

"The completed projects are sold for about what the materials cost," Mr. Kemp said. "It's a good tool to teach the kids on a small scale how to build something on a larger scale."

Metal working includes stick, metal inert gas (MIG), and tungsten inert gas (TIG) welding.

Other subjects include small engine repair, basic electrical wiring and plumbing.

The students learn how to service, tune and care for small engines, such as those on lawnmowers, tillers and weed-eaters. Classroom activities include disassembling and reassembling small engines. The students sometimes bring their own lawnmowers to class to work on.

They are also taught how to wire receptacles and different types of switches in the home. Plumbing installation and repair is another skill they learn in ag shop.

"My job, as a teacher, is to try to help make their tomorrow better," Mr. Kemp said.



A group of Dresden High School Ag students transfer small plants into individual pots as part of their class work in the greenhouse. When the plants are approximately six to eight-inches tall, they will be sold to local gardeners.



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