

Week 4 - Almost there



Students placing their paper pots into the box, ready for watering

Almost half way through the term and we are still a week away from setting up the landscaping to get the school garden operational. It's exciting to think that in two weeks we will have completely transformed the area next to the administration building into a productive food garden. There seems to be a real interest from parents about the garden, with many saying they will be there for the landscaping busy bee. It should be a great atmosphere, with good coffee, cake and even a bbq to keep the workers feed and watered!

Garden Design

We haven't been idle though while we wait for the big push. Students have been doing their own garden designs. They have looked at the site and created designs with consideration of the buildings and land. It has been great to see some of the ideas come out and has led to some discussions on pretty advanced areas like crop rotation, aquaponic systems and soil composition.



Garden Design of my dreams...

'Paper Pot'

We have also carried out sessions where the students created their own 'paper pot', filled it with soil mixture and planted a pea or broad bean. We hope that these will germinate in time to plant into the garden in two weeks. Since we made about 180 over two days, there should be plenty to use



Dan Bakker explaining to 4/5 K how these paper pots go together
The paper pots are really simple to make, use a cheap material which will decompose (paper) and work as really effective pots. Using a rolled up card as the template (about the size of a large toilet paper roll), you simply roll a 15cm wide strip of newspaper around it, making sure there is an overhang on one end. With this overhang you fold it in (this is the base of the pot) and then press down using a round glass jar. Fill with soil and get planting!



Busy making

I was worried that taking so long to get materials and resources together to set up the landscaping day would mean that the kids would lose interest, as each week they would see the same old grass on the garden site. I think we have managed to keep them engaged with some pretty cool hands on science and gardening. Next stop, No Dig Garden methods...

Bega Valley Public School - Garden Busy Bee



Dan Bakker, explaining his design in the outdoor classroom

What an exhausting yet really fulfilling day in the school garden during our busy bee on Saturday 2nd March. We had a great turnout, with about 25 parents, along with their children all ready to lend a hand. The big number meant we got a lot done but also meant we had to work hard at keeping everyone busy with jobs. There is nothing worse than giving up your time on the weekend and then standing around with nothing to do! I hope we managed to keep all hands with something to do.

Dan Bakker, from Bournda Environmental Education Centre, who knows a huge amount about garden designs and Permaculture ideas, did a wonderful job in designing the garden and was busy all day explaining to people what his vision was. The sloping site will mean that the garden will have plenty of interest, but it also means a more difficult landscaping challenge to begin with. Dan had some great ideas, using recycled and cheap materials to create a really useable garden that has a key component in any school, flexibility. In fact, if you wanted to (we hopefully will not), you could pick everything up and place it somewhere else- it is all movable.

The three main jobs for the day were creating the main retaining wall, which allows for the terrace approach to the slope, setting out, lining up and digging in the sleepers used to mark out the garden beds and create a few simple benches for the students to use.

Using sheets of tin and star pickets covered with 2 inch polypipe, a cheap, simple and really effective retaining wall can be put together in an hour or so. And because tin can be easily bent and cut, we could use that to 'dig in' the steps down to the lower garden. We had three dads who decided this was going to be their domain, and they did a fantastic job.

Tin retaining wall



Many hands, light work



Tin retaining wall, showing the cut in step



Job well done!

Setting out the sleepers really gave instant shape to the garden. The slope of the site meant that getting levels right was pretty time consuming, but we made great headway, enough to be ready for the students next week.



Top garden beds taking shape.



Taking a break.

Dan's great ideas

Another one of Dan's great ideas was the use of brick pallets to create simple benches for the students to use to do things like propagate and sort seeds. Getting pallets of the same dimension donated meant that it didn't take long for a team to put together a few benches. Next step is to cut a couple of circles in the top for some basins and fill in the gaps with a bit of timber.



Recycled brick pallets make simple, easy to assemble benches

It was a great day and so exciting to see the garden taking shape. A huge thanks to Alan for all of the site work and ordering he did before the day, to Dan for his ideas and management, to Troy Mott, our Principal, for his support and for getting stuck in on the day, from digging to cooking sausages, he was everywhere! Thanks to the P&C for all of their support for not only the day, where they provided the food, but for the garden program itself. The biggest thanks goes to all those families that gave up their time to help out. Thank you!

Next week sees the students putting in the layered garden beds, ready for the planting of some leafy vegetable seedlings the following week.

Then this garden will really start to look special.

Some more photos from the day...





