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San Diego Offers Free Gardening Classes To Produce Healthy Lifestyles



Photo by [Susan Murphy](#) / KPBS

Above: Students learn about gardening at Olivewood Gardens and Learning Center in National City on May 16, 2011.

By [Susan Murphy](#)

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San Diego County will offer [free gardening classes](#) as part of an initiative to improve health and combat obesity. The hope is for people to eat healthier by learning to grow their own fruits and vegetables and incorporate them into healthy meals.

San Diego County officials and community leaders announced the initiative at the [Olivewood Gardens and Learning Center](#) in National City -- one of the five sites chosen to offer classes starting in June. Director Amy Constensen said the center has only been open for a year, but already it's thriving.



Photo by Susan Murphy

Above: San Diego County officials and community leaders announce the start of five gardening and education centers, May 16, 2011.

"In our first year we had more than 2,400 student visits, primarily from 4th, 5th and 6th graders in the National City School District. And what's surprising is we had 2,200 adult visits as well," said Constensen. "So this is an issue that really is exciting people; and they're curious. They want to learn more, and the kids keep coming back."

San Diego health officials said a third of all school-aged children are overweight or obese. Cheryl Moder, director of the [San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative](#) said the problem stems from neighborhoods surrounded by unhealthy choices.

"In most communities, it's easier to buy an orange soda than it is to buy a bag of oranges," said Moder. "And it can be less expensive to purchase a fast food meal that's laden with fat and calories than it is to buy the ingredients needed to buy a healthful meal at home."

The other garden and education centers sprouting around the county include: [Solana Center](#) in Encinitas; [San Diego Youth Services](#) at Spring Valley East Community Center; the International Rescue Committee locations in [City Heights](#); and [Wild Willow Farm and Education Center](#) in South San Diego.

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