



Don't tell these students they're part of a research project. That could spoil the fun they're having digging in the dirt and picking their own vegetables.

Famed cardiologist Arthur Agatston, M.D., wanted to study how to help elementary schools serve more nutritious school lunches and how to teach students about healthy living. So his nonprofit Agatston Research Foundation launched a research project with the participation of four elementary schools in Central Florida: Kissimmee Charter Academy, Mill Creek Elementary, Partin Settlement Elementary, and PM Wells Charter Elementary.

The researchers on the Healthier Options for Public Schoolchildren (HOPS) study worked with the school district's current food provider to offer meals high in whole grains, fruits, and vegetables and reduce simple sugars and processed foods at these four selected schools. They also created a curriculum to teach the children, their parents, teachers, and staff about nutrition.

Dr. Agatston and his team recognized that gardens at the schools would help the students learn firsthand about the joys of growing and eating fresh, wholesome food. They contacted *Organic Gardening*

for help. We provided a planting calendar, information on planting and caring for the garden, and simple-to-assemble raised-bed frames. And we asked gardening product suppliers to donate seeds, tools, and other gear for the students to use.

The researchers are now compiling their data on how the healthy food and nutrition education affect the students' well-being and performance. But even before the numbers are crunched, Danielle Hollar, Ph.D., leader of the Agatston research team, reports that the vegetable crunching has gone well. "When I visited one of the schools

last spring," she tells us, "one of the students came rushing up to me, very excited to tell me the peas had begun producing in the school's garden."

Park Seed Company, Gempler's, and Ace Hardware Corporation made generous contributions to this project, and we thank them for their support.

For more information about the HOPS study, contact Danielle Hollar, Ph.D., at the Agatston Institute, info@agatstonresearchfoundation.org. To start a community garden in your area, call the American Community Gardening Association at 877-275-2242 or visit communitygarden.org.