

Gardening as a child may lead college students to eat more veggies

September 19 2016, by Brad Buck

As researchers nationwide try to get college students to eat healthier foods, they're finding that gardening may lead to a lasting habit of eating more fruits and vegetables.

That's a recent conclusion from the "Get Fruved" project. "Get Fruved," an acronym for "Get Your Fruits and Vegetables," is a \$4.9 million collaborative project among eight American universities, including the University of Florida. At UF, the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences is leading the campus study. One of the first steps of the project is to better understand what factors predict and influence the health behaviors of college and [high school students](#).

A new study from Get Fruved shows if college students gardened as a child or use their green thumbs now, chances are they will eat more fruits and [vegetables](#) than those who don't.

"This finding is particularly relevant, given the recent popularity of school gardens and farm-to-school projects," said Anne Mathews, a UF/IFAS assistant professor of food science and human nutrition and lead author of the study.

Little to nothing is known about how participating in gardening projects influences nutrition habits after participation in the project ends, Mathews said.

In the study, investigators interviewed 1,351 college students and divided

them into four groups:

- Students who gardened while growing up.
- Students who garden now.
- Students who gardened while growing up and now.
- Students who have never gardened.

Of the students surveyed, 30 percent gardened as a child, and 38 percent currently garden. Students who gardened as a child or report current gardening ate 2.9 cups of fruits and vegetables daily, while those who said they never gardened ate 2.4 cups of fruits and vegetables per day.

"We found that if your parents gardened but you did not, just watching them did not make a difference in how much fruits and vegetables you eat in college. Hands on experience seems to matter," said Mathews.

The new data support the idea of more gardening lessons at school or through a group such as Florida 4-H, Mathews said. With more gardening opportunities for children, researchers reason that college students might consume more produce.

"Get Fruved" uses peer interaction, social media and campus events to try to get high school and [college students](#) to eat more fruits and vegetables, exercise more and manage stress more effectively. They also may expand gardens, work to improve access to healthy foods at campus eateries, hold dance events and challenge each other to exercise more.

National statistics show an alarming increase in adolescent obesity, the target of this study. The percentage of people aged 12 to 19 who were obese increased from 5 percent to nearly 21 percent from 1980 to 2012, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The latest study results are published in an abstract in the *Journal of the*

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and will be presented by Jennifer Loso, a recent UF/IFAS graduate and student research assistant with Mathews, at the annual Food and Nutrition Conference and Exhibition on Oct. 16 in Boston.

Provided by University of Florida

Citation: Gardening as a child may lead college students to eat more veggies (2016, September 19) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-09-gardening-child-college-students-veggies.html>

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