ABSTRACT: Gardening has emerged as valuable way to teach children skills, enhance their intake of fruits and vegetables and increase their fitness levels. In addition, growing produce in a home garden can be less expensive than purchasing in a supermarket and can be very rewarding. Children who help in the garden gain self-confidence, a sense of responsibility and an appreciation of growing food. Children are more likely to try new fruits and vegetable they helped grow, which helps promote the U.S. Dietary Guidelines/MyPlate messages to increase fruits and vegetables. A diet rich in fruits and vegetables has been shown to reduce the risk of obesity, heart disease, diabetes and certain types of cancer. “Kids in the Garden” is a newly developed eight-lesson curriculum highlighting the benefits of gardening and the consumption of fruits and vegetables. The peer-reviewed curriculum, based on a collection of published children’s books, engages preschool-aged children and their parents/caregivers in lessons about seeds, roots, leaves, stems, flowers and vegetables. The lessons feature hands-on gardening activities, art activities and preparation of simple recipes using picture-based recipes. Parents received a weekly newsletter with information about gardening, nutrition and food preparation. In the pilot project, 13 families completed the lesson series and the pre/post surveys. 69% of participants reported reading the gardening newsletter, 92% of parents/caregivers reported that their child talked about gardening, 69% of families grew a garden or container garden at home, and 85% reported their child talked about the gardening activities. On a 1 to 6 scale (6 = highest), parents rated their agreement with the statement “I enjoy gardening with my child/ren” a score of 4.54 on the post-survey, compared with 4.2 on the presurvey.

OBJECTIVES: “Kids in the Garden” curriculum objectives include: 
- Parents/caregivers will increase their awareness of the benefits of gardening.
- Children will increase their awareness of different kinds of fruits and vegetables.
- Children will improve their knowledge of MyPlate and be able to classify specific fruits and vegetables into their appropriate food group.
- Children will prepare and taste-test recipes featuring fruits and vegetables.

METHOD: Hands-on activity-based classes were held weekly for eight weeks with preschool-aged children. The curriculum highlighted the benefits of gardening and the consumption of fruits and vegetables through: 
- Garden-based storybooks
- Hands-on gardening activities
- Art activities
- Picture-based recipe preparation
- Parent newsletters

RESULTS:  
- 13 families participated in the project and completed pre/post surveys
- About 69% of the families read the newsletters.
- 92% of parents/caregivers reported their child talked about gardening.
- 69% of families grew a garden or container garden at home.
- 85% reported their child talked about gardening activities.

EVALUATION: Pre/post surveys of parents and observations of children were conducted.