

## Growing the Mind at the Hebrew Academy Orange County

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Students in all grade levels at the Hebrew Academy of Orange County enjoy the opportunity to grow fruits and vegetables in their own garden and orchard as part of the dual curriculum of Judaic and general studies. The orchard includes the unique species for which Israel is blessed that include figs, grapes, pomegranates, dates and so much more. This is part of the school's program in agriculture education.

The garden program provides a curriculum with experiential opportunities for student inquiry and investigation into health, earth, life sciences, math and social science. In Judaic studies the students study the Torah in its original Hebrew. They learn about the Mitzvot relating to trees and plants and expand their knowledge with their holiday curriculum and stories from the Talmud.

As part of the program, before Rosh Hashanah, all students study about the special qualities of pomegranates and pick their own fruit from the Academy orchard to take home. This program is introduced by science experiments in their general studies classes about plant biology, life cycles and agriculture. The holiday custom of dipping an apple in honey is preceded by introducing the process of extracting honey from beehives. An actual honeycomb from a bee colony was brought to them to see firsthand how the bees

deposit the honey and store it.

Before Sukkot, the students were all excited to pick their own etrog from the Academy orchard. These unique etrog trees were planted during Tu B'shvat by the lower school students with their grandparents as part of intergenerational day activities. This year students were honored to use it during Sukkot for the mitzvah of the lulav and arba minim.



The middle school students harvested the willow branches for the Hoshanot mitzvah and distributed them to local synagogues as part of their Sukkot studies. In another example, their own project-based learning activity delved into the differences between organic and non organic food, business plans, expenses and profits, as well as how different temperatures can affect compost and crops.

Our kindergarteners are always excited about planting their winter crop of snap peas and onions. This year they also planted potatoes to be used for latkes which became part of their culinary program. They got ready for Chanukah by preparing latkes after learning all about different oils and what makes olive oil so special. They studied about

the process of producing pure olive oil for kindling purposes. After selecting the olives, they squeezed them



in an olive press for juice and placed them in a centrifuge to manufacture the oil.

During the spring, students will be learning all about the importance of nutrition and healthy food as part of their education. They are taught to respect the earth and show

gratitude for all its blessings.

The school garden program provides a meaningful context for students to apply new academic concepts as part of their project based learning in middle school. As students use their newfound math and language skills to measure, calculate, graph and communicate about real world concepts, they deepen their understanding of the subject matter while discovering the joy and fascination that characterizes learning within a practical application.

The school's own orchard on the 11-acre campus was planted more than a decade ago, with new trees being added every year. The students are excited about all the trees they have planted and cultivated and invite the Jewish community to tour the Hebrew Academy Israel orchard. 

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