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Horticulture in a Can: Improving Student Grades and Attitudes Toward the Environment

Kathryn L. Karsh, Edward W. Bush, Pamela B. Blanchard and Janice M. Hinson

As a way to bring awareness to Louisiana's vanishing coast, the Department of Horticulture in cooperation with the Louisiana Sea Grant College developed an educational program called "Coastal Roots" aimed at elementary and secondary students. These young people learn to grow coastal plants and then place them in the wetlands to help prevent erosion. Another goal of the program is to provide wetland plant and habitat educational materials to teachers and students. The lessons are designed to not only teach about wetland plants but also the horticulture biology behind how wetland plants grow. Lesson topics include plant identification, wetland habitats, photosynthesis, composting, pollination, genetics, wetland soils and global warming.

For the past two years (2003-2004), the lessons, dubbed "Horticulture in a Can," were taught in four middle schools in South Louisiana – Pierre Part, Montegut, St. Louis King of France in Baton Rouge and St. James Math and Science Academy in Vacherie. One treatment class and one control class were chosen at each school. Before the lessons were taught, pre-tests were given on horticulture and also on children's attitudes toward the environment. The lessons proved successful both years, both for horticulture knowledge and



St. Louis King of France student records temperatures.



Students learn about xylem and phloem transport using oak dowels and bubbles at St. Louis King of France.

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Karsh, Kathryn L..

contributors

- [Blanchard, Pamela B..](#)
- [Bush, Edward W.](#)

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St. Louis King of France students study plant genetics.



Montegut Middle School students count plant hairs to study phenotypes. (Photos by Kathryn L. Karsh)

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