

Grasses in Classes at C. Milton Wright

By Linn Griffiths

Since 2000, biology classes at C. Milton Wright High School have grown submerged aquatic vegetation known as wild celery in their classrooms as part of the "Grasses in Classes" project sponsored by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. Grasses are planted by students in the Bay to help improve the overall health of the Chesapeake Bay. In addition, environmental science classes test water quality of local streams in the Bynum Run Watershed, compile and interpret the results, and write reports with their findings to the Maryland Department of the Environment and Maryland Save Our Streams. Best practices:

- This project met critical environmental needs related to the health of the Chesapeake Bay.
- As part of the issue investigation and service-learning component of the Biology curriculum, students spent a few weeks this spring investigating the importance, problems and restoration of submerged aquatic vegetation (SAVs) to the Chesapeake Bay. The student learned what the best conditions are for the growth of wild celery, an important but dwindling SAV, and grew them in containers for several weeks.
- For the Bay Grasses in classes project, the students did reflective journal entries for homework and then wrote a final reflective essay and selected ones were sent off to all parties involved. For the water quality testing, students also wrote nightly reflective journal entries and a final reflective essay which was also sent to the parties involved.
- Each day the students took turns monitoring the temperature, water depth, and overall condition of the growth chambers. Every Friday, tests were run on pH, nitrate, and carbonate hardness on the chambers to monitor progress. This information, as well as the height measurements of the plants, was faxed to the Maryland Department of Natural Resources where the information was analyzed, compiled and posted on the DNR website. On May 5th, fifteen volunteer students traveled to Rocky Point State Park in Essex where they participated in several activities such as seining in the Bay for biodiversity and planting the grasses the class had grown. The students waded into chest-deep water and dove to plant the grasses. Although wet and muddy, the students felt great pride in helping with the restoration of the severely depleted SAV beds which are so vital to the health of the Chesapeake Bay.
- The Chesapeake Bay Foundation and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources were critical partners in this project.
- We established partnerships with those noted above well in advance of this project. Partners provided many resources so we could engage in this activity. We also needed to arrange for a skipjack trip which helped prepare students to carry out the project.
- Students spent a day aboard the skipjack Martha Lewis of Havre de Grace where they dredged and identified SAVs as well as analyzed the water quality in which they live. Also on board, they learned about the many organisms which depend upon the SAVs to survive.