

Farm Class Descriptions

Basics of Successful Vegetable Gardening

Students will be introduced to the basics of growing vegetables in the Gulf Coast region. Some of the topics covered include information about the growing seasons, our climate, examples of best growing methods & mediums (soil), and specific crop recommendations. We will explore each of these principles, and how they are implemented, in Blackwood's own kitchen garden. Students will leave empowered to begin their own backyard garden successfully.

Introduction to Composting

Students will learn about the fundamental principles of composting, the purpose of compost in your garden, and how to set up a compost system that is right for your garden. This class covers methods such as sheet composting, tumblers, vermicompost, black fly compost, bokashi, and winrow composting. Students will leave with the confidence to begin their own backyard compost system, large or small, and handouts to guide them in their basic set-up after they complete the class.

Compost Tea and Microscopy, Beginning

What is compost tea and why are so many people using it in their gardens these days? In this introductory class, students will explore the biological principles behind compost tea and its role in enhancing soil health. The class covers the basics of how to brew, what to look for in a successful brewer, and how to understand your tea brew (microbiology), and best practices for using tea in your garden. Students will use microscopes to look at and analyze (with farmer guidance) a sample of Blackwood compost tea, bringing the microbiology to life!

Container Gardening, BYO Workshop

As our communities take increasing interest and ownership over their food systems, container gardening has risen in popularity as a simple and easy practice for households to begin growing some of their own herbs and vegetables. In this class, we will discuss how to pick the best container for your needs, the basics of soil care, seeding and transplanting, how to pick the best varieties, and harvesting produce for meal preparation. Students will have an opportunity to explore various methods of container growing in Blackwood's demonstration garden and then construct their own small container garden to take home with them. By the end of the class, students will leave empowered and equipped to begin their own small herb and vegetable garden!

Entomology, A Bug Hunt

No garden or farm can live in isolation from its surrounding ecosystem and insects are an invaluable component of these systems! Both pest and beneficial, insects influence the healthiness of the crops we grow and enjoy. In this class we will explore the different sorts of insects students can find around the Gulf Coast, what the differences between and beneficial insect and a pest are, how cultivating a full ecosystem in your garden creates a healthier space to grow plants, and how to identify which insects may be living in your yard. This class includes a hands-on tour of the Blackwood kitchen garden in which we will go "hunting" to locate and identify all the little critters on the Land and learn what roles they each play in contributing to the healthiness of the plants we are growing!

Flavors of the Farm, An Exploration of Seasonal Food

In this hands-on class, students will tour the Blackwood Kitchen Garden to explore the importance of knowing where our food originates, what's so important about organics, and how to utilize local produce options to prepare nourishing and delicious meals. We will discuss seasonality of produce, current available harvests, and soil care for nutrient-dense vegetables. The class will harvest produce from the gardens to prepare a simple meal they share together.

Introduction to Fruit Trees

Growing your own food is fun and rewarding, but can also be quite labor intensive. Fruit trees offer a low-maintenance alternative to traditional vegetable gardening and can be just as productive! Come learn about the benefits of growing fruit trees, how to choose the best varieties for your home, basic soil and tree maintenance, and how to cultivate bountiful harvests. We'll also discuss methods of container growing for those with limited space. This class includes a tour of both the Blackwood kitchen orchard and our perennial fruit tree tunnel.

Regenerative Farming, A Practice (Tour Only)

Ecological balance, within nature as well as between humans and nature, is the foundation upon which all practices are built at Blackwood Educational Land Institute. In this class, we'll explore the science and permaculture principles behind the magic and beauty of the Land. Students will enjoy an interactive tour in which we explore the principles of biological soil stewardship, natural building methods, the cohesion of design functionality with aesthetics, and the great potential for symbiosis between humans and the natural world. Through careful observation and understanding of nature and her systems, we are implementing unique farm strategies to improve our agricultural efficiency and harmony with the natural world.

Regenerative Farming, A Practice (Tour + Field Work)

Ecological balance, within nature as well as between humans and nature, is the foundation upon which all practices are built at Blackwood Educational Land Institute. In this class, we'll explore the science and permaculture principles behind the magic and beauty of the Land. Students will enjoy an interactive tour in which we explore the principles of biological soil stewardship, natural building methods, the cohesion of design functionality with aesthetics, and the great potential for symbiosis between humans and the natural world. Following the tour, students will engage in an hour of hands-on farm work in our demonstration field where they will have the opportunity to practice soil cultivation methods, how to properly plant different vegetables, and appropriate harvest techniques. Through careful observation and understanding of nature and her systems, we are implementing unique farm strategies to improve our agricultural efficiency and harmony with the natural world.

Seasonal Nutrition Garden Exploration

In this class, students will explore the importance of seasonal eating as it relates to our health and nutrition. We will discuss what produce (vegetables and fruits) is currently available at local farms and farmers markets as well as how to prepare simple, delicious meals with this produce. The class will take a tasting tour of the Blackwood Kitchen Garden in order to better experience all the flavors the current season has to offer. Students will leave with recipes, kitchen tips, and new knowledge to successfully prepare healthy, seasonal dishes at home.

Soil Making & Greenhouse Growing

Starting plants from seed in a greenhouse is a great way to maximize your garden's production. The key to growing healthy transplants lies in using a good soil base with living compost. In this class, students will learn the basics of compost, how to mix potting soil, and proper techniques for greenhouse seeding and propagation to help them get started growing transplants.

Tomatoes for All!

From pasta and pizza to ratatouille and masala curry, tomatoes are a fundamental ingredient in the most popular dishes all around the world, but where does this magical fruit come from and how does it grow here in the Gulf Coast? In this class we will cover a brief history of the tomato (Did you know they used to be considered poisonous? Or that they used to be called 'Love Apples'?), discuss the best techniques for cultivating and caring for tomato plants, and learn about a few simple dishes you can prepare using fresh tomatoes! Tomato tastings offered as seasonally available.

Vermicomposting 101

In this hands-on lecture, students will learn how to vermicompost, a compost method that utilizes worms to break down organic waste matter into humus compost. We will explore the basic principles of vermicompost, various construction methods, how vermicompost may be used in your backyard or patio garden, how to harvest castings and tea, and what the essential soil benefits are to using this method. The class will tour the Blackwood compost demonstration site, which contains three unique worm bin styles, to explore the various methods in practice.

Vermicomposting 101, BYO Workshop (“Build Your Own”)

In this hands-on lecture, students will learn how to vermicompost, a compost method that utilizes worms to break down organic waste matter into humus compost. We will explore the basic principles of vermicompost, various construction methods, how vermicompost may be used in your backyard or patio garden, how to harvest castings and tea, and what the essential soil benefits are to using this method. The class will tour the Blackwood compost demonstration site, which contains three unique worm bin styles, to explore the various methods in practice. At the end of the lecture, students will be guided through the process of constructing their very own bucket worm bin to take home and start their own practice.