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APPRECIATING OUR FOOD AND WHERE IT COMES FROM

We feel very fortunate to have started a link with Weleda UK who are based in Ilkeston. They grow 300 plant species into their herb gardens for use in their beauty products and homeopathic medicines. They grow using the biodynamic method which means that plants are planted and harvested at an appropriate time in the moon cycle. Plants are also grown organically without chemicals.

For healthy plants we need healthy compost.

COMPOST

On a horrendously soggy Wednesday morning, Crich Junior School were making compost and planting seeds with two gardeners from Weleda. They were helping us and giving us tips for keeping our garden healthy. We learnt so much we thought we would show you how you can do it in your garden.

To make a compost heap.

1. Use bamboo canes to measure out a box as big as you like.
2. Put holes in the ground inside the box shape you have made. This is so the worms can get in. You can use a rake to do this.
3. Put a layer of grass cuttings on top of the worm holes and water that layer.
4. Put on a layer of fruit and vegetable peelings. Water that layer.
5. Add another grass cutting layer or you

could use nettles. Don't put too much on otherwise it will overwhelm the layer and the compost heap will fall over.

6. Then water that layer. It's got to be kept damp.
7. Put another layer of kitchen waste on top, remember no meat products or chemicals as it is bad for the compost.

Keep layering the heap and don't forget to water each layer. You now have a healthy compost heap. This is what we put on our compost heap:

Conkers

Mouldy pumpkins

Rock dust

Chicken droppings

Handy hints

Nettles are a good compost material but make sure you wear gloves, don't get stung!!!

We hope our tips for making a compost heap come in useful and you have lots of fun, because we did.

By Megan (Y 5), Dylan and Daniel (Y 6)





To help us with our growing, we also need to improve our watering system.

Our Poly-tunnel watering system

We came to a decision that we needed an automatic watering system because it was hard work watering a lot of produce. This is how it works.

Energy

We get our energy for our pump from the solar panel which gets its energy from the sun. Although it is very efficient, it does not work if the sun is not out. We store the solar energy in the car battery so we can run the pump at any time.

Water

Rain water drains off the roof into the gutter and into the storage tank. The pump pumps the water into the hose pipe with sprinkler holes.

Ways to turn it on – there are two ways to turn the system on. The system can turn on by itself when the probe in the soil senses it is too dry. This probe is a moisture sensor. We also have a manual override switch because the system is not always perfect.

What happens if we run out of water?

If the water level in the tank is too low we have a float switch that tells the system to switch off to prevent the pump from being damaged.

What next?

The system was working well over the summer while we were not here. However, it is only watering one side of the beds so we are planning to extend the watering system to the other side. You can see the difference between the two sides in our photographs.

By Daniel (Y 6) and Phoenix (Y 4)



STRONGER HEALTHIER BODIES

We have been studying the importance of milk in our diet in science.

Local visit to Sayles Dairy Farm

As part of our Food for Life project all children in our school visited Sayles' farm in Crich. In school we have been looking at skeletons and how calcium helps our bones and teeth grow stronger. Milk is an excellent source of calcium so Paul, Joyce and Luke, an ex-pupil of our school, showed us around their wonderful dairy farm. This helped us see where our dairy products come from and how they keep the milk clean ready for us to drink.

After the long, exhausting walk, we arrived at the farm and went to see the calves. We were able to name some of the calves ... we called a two-day old calf Steve and another one Blossom. The calf pens were very stinky! There were lots of flies too! There were two calves in each pen but some of them wanted to jump in to the other ones.

There were two different breeds of cows: Aberdeen Angus and Friesian. Each calf had a tag in its ear to show which farm the cows came from, which country it is from, its gender and breed and which cow is its mother.

Some of the naughty calves tried to lick and suck our fingers. Some of us liked it

and others didn't. Their tongues were slimy but they were smooth like paper. Their hair was black or dark brown and some of them had white splodges. Their heads were silky smooth to touch.

When we were in the calf barn, we had to keep quiet and calm so that we didn't frighten or startle the calves.

Following our tour around the farm, we went to the milking parlour.

The first thing we saw was a huge, massive tank which held all of the milk. It holds 6000 litres, has to be kept at 3.5 degrees Celsius and is emptied every other day by the milk lorry before it gets too full. The cows are tempted into the milking shed by having corn to eat. Each cow is milked twice a day, producing four gallons of lovely, yummy sweet milk!

Before the milking process, minty soap is used to clean the cows' udders (sometimes Paul cleans them himself with water and paper towels). Tubes on the milking machine are attached to the cows' teats and when the machine is switched on, it squeezes and sucks so that all of the milk goes into a small tank, before going into a larger one.

After that we headed towards a very strange noise – it sounded like a cow with a sore throat. However, we approached a large, dark barn and found Wallace Packer – the



huge Aberdeen Angus bull of Sayles' Farm. Wallace is the dad of all the calves found on the farm. His barn was close to the other cows' barn but he was not allowed in with them as they wanted to limit the amount of calves born. Paul, Joyce and Luke use a chart that looked like a dartboard to help them know when the best time to breed is. There are certain times of the year when mating is recommended to ensure the calves are born healthy.

Although Wallace may look huge, dangerous and terrifying, he wouldn't mean to hurt you. You may even see him if you walk through one of the fields near Sayles' Farm using the public footpath as he is harmless. However, don't get too close if you are wearing anything bright. Some of the colours he doesn't like are bright red, neon pink and lime green. When we first saw him, we were a little nervous but we then warmed to him when we knew he was a friendly bull. Following our bull encounter we were whisked off through a pavement of cow poo! It smelt horrific! Most children quite happily strolled through it but Amelie and Olly tried to avoid it as much as possible. Luckily we were equipped with wellies. We were then taken to a huge mountain of corn. The corn is used to feed the cows throughout the year. Alongside this they are given silage (wet grass) to eat in the winter months and hay in the summer. The corn is kept shut away in a large barn. Doing so means birds and other animals are not able to get it. This prevents them from eating it and pooing on it. If a cow was to get in the barn, it would either die of consuming too much corn or it could get very ill from the bird poo – this is poisonous to cows.

Hay is widely used on farms to feed cows. At Sayles' farm we saw approximately 1000 hay bales. Paul and Luke drive a tractor with a machine attached to it. This machine is

used to roll the hay up tightly from the fields into bales. It is then wrapped up in black cellophane-like material to keep it dry and warm. It's very important not to climb on or let dogs jump on the hay bales as they have to be thrown away if they're damaged or air is let in. We found learning about the food for the cows really interesting as we learnt lots we didn't know before.

All in all we felt our time at the farm was great because we learnt where all our delicious milk comes from. We would like to thank the Sayles family for inviting us to visit their farm!

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