

The Willows State School: where technologies, tasting and community come together

"I ate the white peach and it was so yum. I've never tried a white peach before." – Henley, year 1 student

One piece of white peach. It might seem like a small moment, but it captures the heart of Pick of the Crop: creating opportunities for students to explore new veggies and fruits, discover new favourites and build positive food experiences that can shape lifelong healthy habits.

Since joining the Pick of the Crop initiative in 2025, The Willows State School has reimagined what food education can look like. Supported by \$5,000 in initial funding and a further \$2,000 boost grant, what began as a funded initiative has flourished into a whole-school approach to healthy food education.

Today, every one of the school's 876 students from Prep to Year 6 is part of the journey. Through curriculum-aligned, garden-based learning in Technologies, students are growing, cooking, tasting and enjoying more veggies and fruit. A remarkable achievement of how Pick of the Crop can become part of everyday school life when embraced with purpose, creativity and ongoing commitment.

Where curriculum comes to life

Walk into a Technologies lesson at The Willows and you won't find students simply reading about food production, you'll find them living it.

Developed and led by Technologies Specialist Teacher and Pick of the Crop champion, Mr Tim Menzies, Pick of the Crop has been thoughtfully integrated into the school's Technologies units. Every year level from Prep to Year 6 now takes part in garden-based learning aligned with Version 9 of the Australian Curriculum.

What sets the school's approach apart is the variety and depth of the growing experiences. Students are not simply working in a traditional vegetable patch; they are exploring wicking beds, hydroponics and aeroponics, comparing different ways food can be grown and applying their learning directly in the garden.

By connecting classroom concepts with real-world experiences, students are developing food literacy while discovering how sustainability, agriculture and healthy eating intersect.

Tim's innovative approach has not gone unnoticed. After sharing his Technologies units at teacher professional development events, he has been invited to present at the upcoming Pick of the Crop Curriculum Connect technologies session, providing practical inspiration for educators looking to embed food education within their own curriculum.

From garden to plate

Fresh produce harvested by students finds its way into cooking lessons through the OzHarvest FEAST program, where veggies and fruit become healthy meals and recipes become practical life skills. In one hands-on garden-to-table experience, Year 5 and 6 students harvested fresh herbs and produce before making flatbread and a range of homemade dips, including hummus, parsley pesto, beetroot raita, carrot and spice dip, and cucumber, herb and yoghurt dip. Reaping the delicious rewards of their harvest!



Creating positive food experiences

If there was one activity that challenged expectations, it was Try It Tuesdays. Originally introduced as a simple fruit tasting experience 'pilot', it quickly became one of the school's most talked-about activities.

POTC has changed the way I teach food specialisations ...it has made it real world and authentic and meets the needs of all the learners in my classroom.

Tim Menzies

Digital Learning Specialist / Technologies Teacher

Students eagerly sampled unfamiliar fruits including berries, melons, grapes and stone fruit. Many were tasting these fruits for the very first time and they simply loved it:

"I never tried any of the stone fruit before and the orange nectarine was the best!" – Tia

"I tried all of them. I liked the nectarine, it had lots of flavour." – Jayde

For staff, it was an unexpected reminder of what can happen when children are given access to pressure-free opportunities to explore fresh food that they may not get at home.

The enthusiasm shown by students has inspired the school to take the next step, with veggie tasting days now planned to encourage students to continue exploring an even wider variety of fresh produce.



Growing through community partnerships

Strong community partnerships have played an important role in supporting and strengthening The Willows State School's Pick of the Crop journey.

Fresh Fruit Fridays help supply fruit for classroom brain breaks and the breakfast club, helping students access fresh produce throughout the school day. Their local Bunnings worked alongside students to support garden design, while Project Plants Nursery donated seedlings and soil to help expand the school's growing spaces.

The school's garden also attracted wider community recognition. In April 2026, local MP Natalie Marr visited to learn more about the initiative and see firsthand how their garden is supporting student learning and wellbeing.

These partnerships have enriched learning while demonstrating the important role local communities can play in fostering a sustainable positive food culture.

A food culture worth celebrating

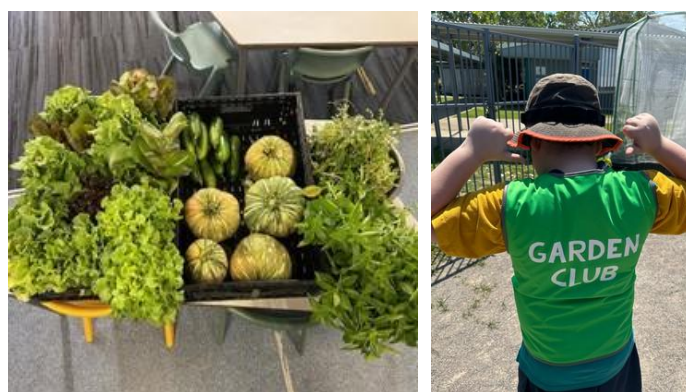
As Pick of the Crop has become part of everyday school life, students have become its strongest advocates.

Garden club updates are regularly shared at school assemblies, giving students the opportunity to celebrate progress, showcase what they are growing and build pride in their achievements.

The initiative has also become a feature of school events. At Under 8s Days, Tim and his team delivered a fruit salad station, providing families with a positive, food experience alongside their children. These shared experiences help reinforce consistent healthy eating messages between school and home.

Students have also taken their learning one step further through Garden Produce Sale Days, on one occasion selling lettuce, cucumbers, pumpkins, chillies, herbs and seedlings to families. Funds raised were reinvested back into Pick of the Crop, creating a practical cycle of growing, sharing and giving back.

Looking ahead, the school plans to expand its garden and develop an undercover outdoor learning space, building on its strong foundations to create more opportunities for students to engage in hands on learning throughout the year.



A recipe for success

The Willows State School demonstrates that Pick of the Crop is far more than an initiative. When embedded with vision, passion and purpose, and some good old fashioned hard work, it becomes a catalyst for building food literacy, consolidating learning, strengthening community connections and fostering a positive food culture that will benefit the whole school community now and for years to come.