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## A Green Thumbs up to Junior Master Gardeners



Graduates of the Junior Master Gardeners program pose for photos with the Perris City Council Sept. 28 after receiving Certificates of Recognition for their accomplishment.

The 17 Perris school kids who earned the title of "Junior Master Gardener" said they learned a lot from participating in the City-sponsored green thumb program.

They gained insight into the life cycle of crops, from planting to harvesting to consumption at the dining table.

They soaked up the importance of watering—but not overwatering—the corn and tomatoes and other crops grown in the Perris community garden, and of removing the aphids and other bugs that damage produce.

Over the course of eight weeks and 100 hours of curriculum, the elementary and middle school students learned environmental sciences, horticulture, food process and development, and environmental sustainability. They will now take those skills to their schools and become student leaders at campus community gardens.

The City of Perris honored the 17 youngsters at the Sept. 26 City Council meeting, where they were presented Certificates of Recognition and posed for photos with Mayor Michael Vargas and members of the City Council.



Perris Mayor Michael Vargas prepares to pin a "key to the City" lapel on Junior Master Gardener Leah Cello during the Sept. 26 City Council meeting. Leah's clear and enthusiastic recital of the Pledge of Allegiance impressed the Mayor and fellow City Councilmembers who praised her and earned the May Ranch Elementary School student the accolade from Vargas.

The Junior Master Gardener courses took place as part of the Perris Green City Farm Program, as the community garden is officially known. The City is working with schools, churches, non-profits and community-based groups to build 30 community gardens from one end of Perris to the other over the next year.

Perris staffers Eduardo Sida, Martin Martinez and Maria Marquez conducted the Junior Master Gardener program.

"We are very proud of the accomplishments of our Junior Master Gardeners," Sida said. "The program intends to help young people become good gardeners and good citizens so they can make a positive contribution to their community, school and family."

Program graduates Taylor Valenzuela and Kendall Calderon said they've taken the lessons learned at the community garden to home. Both have planted gardens at home. Taylor's includes corn, tomatoes and aloe vera.

"I'm really excited to learn how to grow plants, how to water and fertilize them," said Taylor, 10, a fifth-grader at May Ranch Elementary School. "We learned how to maintain a garden properly. We also learned about conserving water and working together as a team."

Kendall, 11, a sixth-grader at Sierra Vista Middle School, said his home garden includes tomatoes, squash, iceberg lettuce, green onions and strawberries. "I feel great I know how to garden and can actually help the City."



Perris staff member Eduardo Sida with Kendall Calderon and Taylor Valenzuela, two graduates of the Junior Master Gardener program.

Other students recognized for their achievement as Junior Master Gardeners included Armando Alfaro, May Ranch Elementary; Samantha Alfaro, Lakeside Middle School; Ethen Alvarado, Innovative Horizons Charter School; Daynell Calderon May Ranch Elementary; Diana J. Castañeda, California Military Institute; Daniel Cello, Innovative Horizons Charter School; Leah Cello, May Ranch Elementary; Abby Cox, May Ranch Elementary; Maylee Cox, May Ranch Elementary; Jonathon Garcia, Ridgemoor Elementary; Emily Olmos, May Ranch Elementary; Erik Olmos, California Military Institute; Alex Soriano IV, Lakeside Middle School; Brooke Soriano, May Ranch Elementary and Ryan Valenzuela, May Ranch Elementary.

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