

The Best Day Ever

Article and Photos by Debbie Kim and Michele Campbell, Rockwall County Extension Master Gardeners

“This was the best day ever!”

That’s how Victoria, a student from the Junior Master Gardener (JMG) program at Dorris A. Jones Elementary School, summed up her experience after the first day of class. She’s just one of the proud “Jones Garden Warriors”—the first JMG graduating class at Jones Elementary, earning their certificates of completion for the Vegetable and Herb series on May 1, 2025.

Gardening with children is a meaningful way to nurture both their understanding and their connection to the natural world. It teaches responsibility, patience, time management, and the reward of growing their own plants. Gardening also supports and promotes physical and emotional health by encouraging outdoor activity, reducing stress, and improving focus. Through the Junior Master Gardener program, students explore topics such as plant growth, soil and water, insects and disease, and growing fruits and vegetables while engaging in hands-on learning that naturally weaves in science, math, and environmental awareness.

When children participate in growing fruits and vegetables, they become more curious about healthy eating and are more likely to try the foods they’ve helped cultivate. This experience also fosters confidence and a sense of accomplishment as they watch something they planted thrive. Beyond the educational and health benefits, gardening strengthens bonds with family members and peers by promoting teamwork and shared responsibilities. Most importantly, it cultivates a lasting respect for nature.

Beyond gardening, JMG promotes service and leadership. As part of their final project, the Jones Garden Warriors assembled 100 pinecone bird feeders for Rockwall Meals on Wheels clients in honor of Father’s Day. A meaningful act that taught them about the importance of the Meals on Wheels food delivery program and food security for members of our aging community.

The six-week pilot program at Jones Elementary was nothing short of inspiring. Building on this momentum, the Rockwall County Master Gardeners are launching a new summer session—**Literature in the Garden**, a JMG curriculum, hosted at the Rockwall County Library. At printing, this class is already full, demonstrating a strong community desire for youth-focused gardening programs.

Junior Master Gardener is an international youth gardening program of the university cooperative Extension system, created and managed by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension. In Rockwall County, certified Master Gardeners lead the JMG classes, guiding young learners in after-school programs and library programs. Classes can also meet in a variety of settings including 4-H clubs, scout groups, homeschool groups, and summer camps.

Want to get involved?

The Junior Master Gardener program thrives thanks to volunteers—teachers, parents, grandparents, and passionate community members—anyone interested in helping children grow a love for gardening. Whether you’re an experienced gardener or simply someone eager to support youth education, you can make a difference.

To learn more about how to participate, visit jmgkids.us or reach out to the Rockwall County Extension Master Gardeners at **972-204-7660** or rockwallmg@ag.tamu.edu.