Lessons in growth
Upper St. Clair students embrace gardening project

A gardening project at Upper St. Clair’s Gilfillan Farm has thumbs turning green in Lynn Kistler’s environmental science class.

“The kids have been super-enthusiastic,” she reported, “We actually started some plants inside, right after spring break. They’ll come into class and run to the window to check their plants right away, and they’re like their little babies.”

The seedlings that sprouted at Upper St. Clair High School are being transferred to raised beds on the Gilfillan property that not only beautifies the rural oasis along Route 19 but benefits families in need: Vegetables grown in the garden are donated to the South Hills Interfaith Movement’s food pantries in Bethel Park, Baldwin Borough and Whitehall. The cooperative arrangement began last spring with an invitation for students to tend to the five raised beds near the farm’s Orr Road entrance. The students built five more this year and plan to fill them all, thanks to donations from several area businesses, community groups and the TangerKIDS grant program.

“We’re going to have 480 square feet of raised-bed space,” Kistler, the high school’s science department curriculum leader said. “If we’re doing the square-foot garden method, that’s 480 different mini-plots. So if you think about it that way, there’s a lot of planting that is going to need to go on.”

The technique of dividing the growing area into 12-by-12-inch sections, popularized by the late author Mel Bartholomew, allows for a variety of plantings within relatively small spaces.