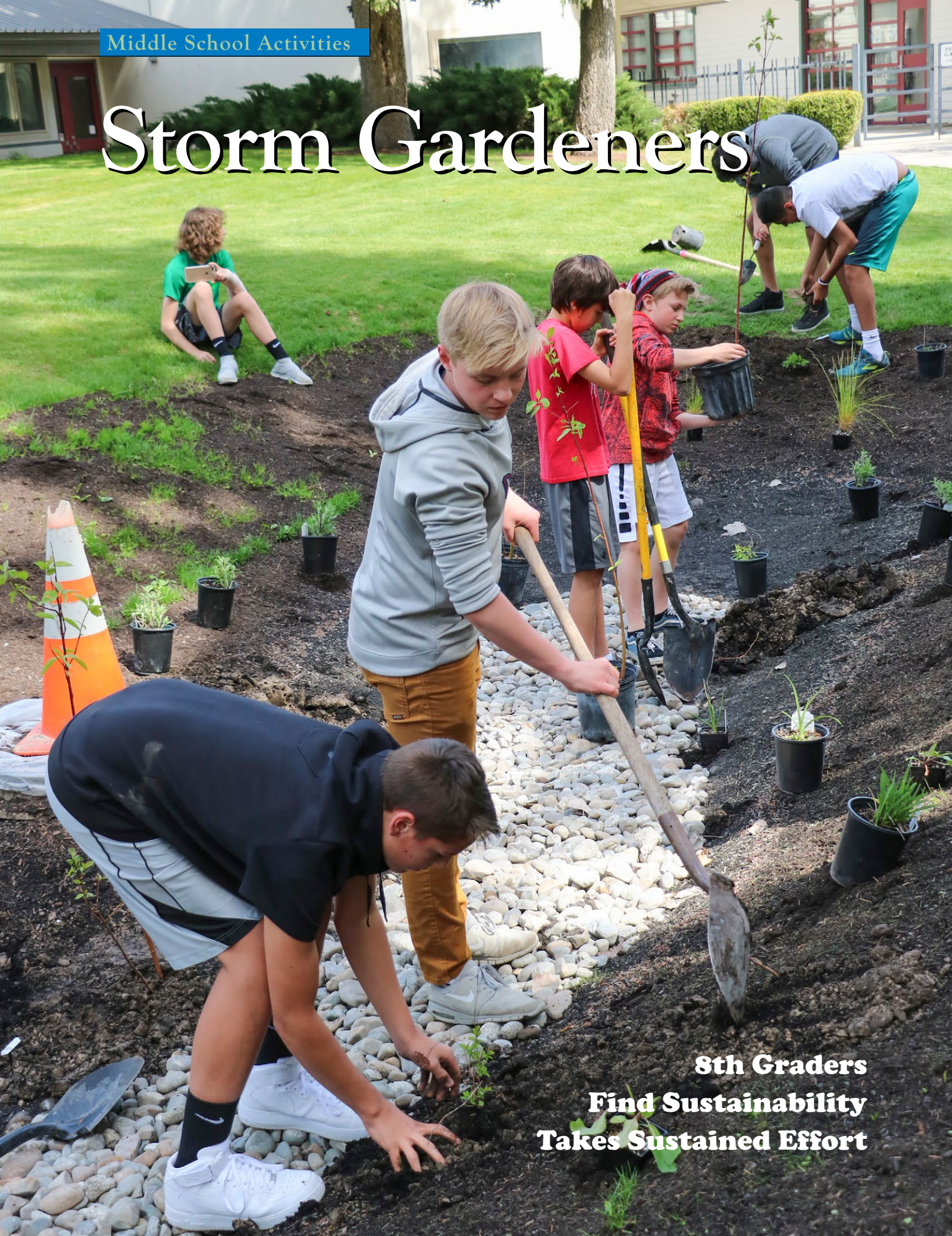


# Storm Gardeners



**8th Graders  
Find Sustainability  
Takes Sustained Effort**

Active learning works best for Middle School students, and one way Saint George's puts this philosophy into practice is through year-long themes for each grade.

The sixth grade makes "River Connections" by raising rainbow trout in their classroom and through activities on the Little Spokane, Spokane, Clearwater, and Snake Rivers. The seventh graders are "Water Warriors", testing water quality, planting trees, and removing invasive species.

For the eighth graders, their theme of "Sustainability" evolved into a year-long project of studying and employing aspects of engineering, construction, and maintenance related to storm gardens. Ultimately, the storm garden they built in front of the Middle School is a lasting testament to the lessons they learned and what the class can accomplish when they work together.

Eighth-grade student Stella Brown summed up the project well, "It's about sustainability, and adding something to the school that would look nice. It's a natural filtration system with plants that filter and do well in the local environment."

Many people collaborated to make this opportunity possible for SGS students. Health/PE instructor Jim Tuck began conversations with Kat Hall from The Lands Council last spring and Outdoor Director, Melanie Mildrew, facilitated the project throughout this school year. Spokane County contributed \$1,700 to the project, an amount equivalent to SGS's annual stormwater fee. The project team included Kat Hall, Amanda Hess (Spokane County Stormwater Utility), Kristen Zimmer (City of Spokane Water Dept.), and Matt Wright (engineering consultant at AHBL, Inc.).

"It was our first time facilitating this year-long curriculum culminating in a full-blown storm garden design and construction project," said Kat Hall.

In the fall, students visited local storm gardens at Broadway & Oak and the median at Country Homes to see design principles first-hand. Eighth-grade teachers, Sarah Berentson and Brian Hutchinson, with Steve Gavin, were on hand as Kat led lessons roughly twice a month beginning in October.

Stella said, "We made permeable pavement in...class. Water had to go through it, but it was too expensive for this garden." Another student, Ari Patton-Scruggs, added, "The pavement gave us an understanding of what we are trying to accomplish in the garden. We looked up plants, and wrote down our favorites. The water will actually filter in, follow the rocks, instead of directly flooding the plants. We wanted plants that won't get eaten by deer."

In early spring, the project team considered the students' proposed locations for the storm garden. Stella said, "(student) groups identified spots on campus that would be best for animals, plants, traffic, etc. The place where we are building the storm garden will be the best location. It was already used for drainage." Ari added, "It's getting repurposed. It's a good viewing spot for visitors, and the signage can show how people can fix their gardens in ways that look pretty and are sustainable."

The SGS facilities crew prepared the site by digging out the swale in front of the Middle School, then students spent all day on April 13 filling the base with rocks, dirt, and compost. They beautified their project with plantings and bark mulch on May 3 and June 4. According to Ari, he and Stella "are both on the sign team, figuring out what information and decorations to put on the signs that will identify the plants."

"The students excelled in the hands-on, practical activities and seemed to enjoy getting their hands dirty," said Kat. "The storm garden is their legacy, and they can be proud of it."

Look for the eighth-graders' storm garden the next time you drive through campus. It's a natural example of how SGS strives to fulfill its mission to **inspire scholars, athletes, and artists to serve and lead others**. This Sustainability capstone project helped **inspire the confidence** to do just that.

— Joelle Neiwert,  
Middle School Principal



**Joelle Neiwert,  
Middle School  
Principal**

**Opposite:  
Eighth graders spread  
compost before  
planting native  
grasses and shrubs.**

**Below:  
Getting their hands  
dirty, and standing  
in their completed  
storm garden.**

