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# Sowing poppies

By Jennifer Wadsworth / Tracy Press / Wednesday, 13 February 2008

The TRAQC Educational Foundation will take applications from teachers to plant seeds.

California poppies once grew so abundantly in the Central Valley that entire meadows would be blanketed in orange. Today, the vibrant blooms are far and few between, especially in Tracy.

So a handful of local students are gearing up this spring to bring them back by scattering poppy seeds in yards, parks and vacant lots around town.

The TRAQC Educational Foundation, a separate organization from the Tracy Regional Alliance for a Quality Community, paid for a stock of flower seeds to give to classes in Jefferson and Tracy Unified school districts to plant in time for spring.

Learning about plants native to the state and the region will foster in school kids an appreciation for local ecology, board member Celeste Garamendi said today.

"The more kids that understand and appreciate our natural environment, the more people we'll have involved in taking action to preserve and enhance it," she said.

The Great Valley Center, a Modesto-based environmental organization, awarded a grant to pay for the poppy seeds, which marks the first time the Education Foundation has promoted life sciences. In the past, the foundation printed coloring books to teach elementary students about Tracy history.

"We just thought it was time to teach more about the environment, about ecology," Garamendi said.

The foundation put the word out early this month for teachers to apply by Feb. 20 for a poppy seed packet, which includes student worksheets, some reading materials and the actual seeds.



Photo by Enrique Gutierrez/Tracy Press

Money from the same grant will also pay to take students on field trips to local nature and wildlife preserves, like the Cosumnes River Preserve or other regional parks between Lodi and Sacramento.

If schools prove responsive enough to the poppy planting, the foundation board will pay for it annually and begin accepting applications for teachers to apply every January.

**At a glance**

**WHAT:** California Poppy Project

**WHEN:** Now through Feb. 20

**INFO:** To request packets of poppy seeds, e-mail teacher name, school, grade, number of students and phone number to [tef@starband.net](mailto:tef@starband.net)

• We want to hear what you have to say. To reach Tracy Press reporter Jennifer Wadsworth, call 830-4225 or e-mail [jwadsworth@tracypress.com](mailto:jwadsworth@tracypress.com).

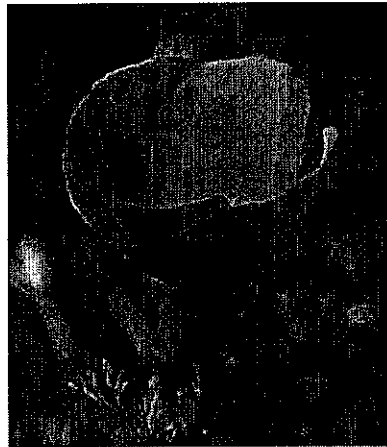


Photo by Enrique Gutierrez/Tracy Press

Robert Garrett, a fifth-grade teacher at North Elementary School, was one of the first to sign up his class. By the end of the season, the board expects 40 classes to sign up.

Encouraging kids to start sowing poppy seeds was on part of the Educational Foundation board's push to get local students more interested in science, and especially interested in their local environment.

Board members are also finishing up a nature activity book that teaches students about plants, animals and the environment in their own backyard. It's a book about the natural world in Tracy, Garamendi said. The board plans to print 2,000 copies for third- and fourth-graders by fall.

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