



Willie and the Salad Bonanza Contest

Willie and the Salad Bonanza is a hands-on competition that brings plant science into the classroom, challenging middle and high school teams to grow their own salad greens while exploring the factors that influence plant growth. Teams compete to produce the largest harvest of three provided varieties of leafy greens over a 48-day growing period while documenting their process along the way.

Each team is tasked with growing all three varieties together in a single communal container using no more than approximately 5 gallons (18.927 liters) of growing medium. Teams determine how many seeds of each variety to plant, with at least one seed of each type required. The container volume may not exceed 18,927 cm³ (18.927 liters), including liquid solution for teams using hydroponic systems. Throughout the competition, teams must document their growing practices. The required Cultural Practices Document must be submitted with the final entry at the time of weighing and may be used as a tiebreaker in the event of a tie.

Following judging, plaques will be awarded to the top entries in each category: grades 6–8, grades 9–12, and mixed ages. Plaques will recognize the winning school or organization and include the names of team members (maximum of four members per team).

Contest Schedule:

- **August 3:** Registration opens
- **September 1-10:** Seed pickup at the Johnson County Extension Office (by a sponsor or designee)
 - 11811 S. Sunset Drive, Suite 1500, Olathe, KS; 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
- **September 11:** Official planting day – This is where the contest begins.
- **September – October:** Growing period
- **October 28:** Classroom visits. Projects will be harvested and weighed.
- **November 2:** Winners are announced! Plaques will be distributed as they become available.

Contest Rules

I. Registration: Complete registration at <https://lp.constantcontactpages.com/ev/reg/dmrvu5r>

- Open to 4-person teams of Kansas students in grades 6–12.
 - Competition divisions include grades 6–8, grades 9–12, and Mixed Age.
- Each team must select a team name and may only include students participating on one team.
- Team sponsors will receive required forms after registration is completed.
- Seed pickup: September 1–10, 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m. at the Johnson County Extension office
 - 11811 S. Sunset Drive, Suite 1500, Olathe, KS
- **Teams are responsible for selecting their own growing materials and methods, including potting medium and hydroponic systems. Extension will provide seeds only.**

II. Growing Period

- **Planting Date:** Seeds may not be planted before September 11, 2026. Contestants and sponsors must verify planting date on the entry form. Germination or soaking may not begin before September 11, 2026. Transplanting is allowed after germination.
- **Seeds:** Seeds are provided free to registered sponsors. Teams determine planting quantities but must have at least one surviving plant of each provided variety on judging day.
- **Containers & Judging:** Containers may be any material but may not exceed 18.927 liters (approximately 5 gallons). Hydroponic systems may be replenished as needed but must remain within the volume limit. Winners are determined by the highest plant biomass produced per volume of growing medium – so more medium means lower measurements!
- **Growing Conditions:** Teams select their own growing medium, amendments, lighting, temperature, and watering practices as part of the learning experience. Growth hormones are prohibited. All growing conditions, amendments, and practices must be documented in the Cultural Practices Documentation Form.

III. Cultural Practices Documentation Form

- Keep detailed records of all cultural practices throughout the competition.
- Submit a completed **Cultural Practices Documentation Form** with your entry on October 28, 2026. Failure to submit the form will result in disqualification.

IV. Contest Judging-Oct. 28, 2026

Entries must **schedule an appointment** to be visited by a Johnson County Extension Office representative on October 28 during school hours. The leafy greens must still be **unharvested** and in their original growing container. Teams must have at least one surviving plant of each of the three required leafy greens. Students are required to attend judging, observe the evaluation process, and be available to answer questions.

Judging Criteria

1. Entries will be ranked by plant biomass per volume of growing medium (g/cm^3). Plant biomass will be measured by K-State Research and Extension representatives by harvesting all above-ground plant material at the soil line. Growing medium volume will also be measured. The highest biomass-to-volume ratio in each division wins. Ties will be broken using the Cultural Practices Documentation Form.
2. Following judging, teams may take their harvested plants and containers home.
3. Judging will be conducted by K-State Research and Extension staff and volunteers.

Awards

Awards will be presented in divisions 6–8, 9–12, and Mixed Age. The top team in each division will receive a plaque recognizing the school or organization and listing team members.

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