

GETTING STARTED

Introduction

School gardens are more than a collection of plants. They are learning laboratories, which put the natural world at students' fingertips.



Children enjoy learning through the direct experiences a garden can provide, which encompasses both the natural and academic world. A garden, whether it is a single planter box or several raised beds, offers a rich context for exploring science, nutrition, social studies, math, art, language arts, and more. There is much to be learned while caring for the green and growing plants of this world.

Benefits of the School Garden

Some of the many benefits of a garden are:

- Integrate curriculum in areas of science, math, social studies, and language arts.
- Connect children to the earth and the source of their food.
- Enhance children's awareness and appreciation of the environment.
- Provide a strategy and meaningful activity for working with "at risk" students.
- Help students develop a strong sense of belonging, fellowship, caring, and community through garden activities.
- Instill pride, ownership, and responsibility among students and community members.
- Acquire additional funds, resources, and support through successful garden activities.
- Increase self-esteem of students.

Getting Started



Building a Garden Team

It is important to cultivate the support of a team to assist with the implementation of a garden-based education.

From the administrators who provide overall support, to the teachers who direct meaningful activity, to the parents who organize work parties, and to the maintenance staff who may assist with irrigation and supplies, it takes the help of everyone - not just one or two interested teachers - to make a school garden work successfully.

Don't try to start too big or move too fast. You need to build ownership and responsibility for all garden spaces.



Getting Started

Parents, teachers, students, maintenance personnel, and administrative staff should all be partners. This will connect them with the garden and ensure their commitment to its success. A summary of the garden plan should be given to administrators to keep them informed of your progress.

The summary might answer these questions:

- Why have a school garden program?
- What are your goals and objectives?
- How will you evaluate your success?
- Who is providing the leadership?
- Who will be on the planning committee and what is their role?
- Has a site been identified?
- How much space is needed?
- How will the children be involved?
- What tools and garden supplies are needed?
- How much money is required and have funding sources been identified?
- What is the length of the program?

Budget and Funding Sources

Fundraising is a critical step in setting up a garden program. Try to find dynamic individuals who have an interest in this area. This is an opportunity to foster ownership within the community.

Ask the principal about federal and state entitlement programs for various subject areas that may be available to support the garden. Attend city council, PTA, and community meetings to request money and support. Explore your local community for possible grants such as garden clubs, public school foundations, local nurseries, and stores.

Contact community businesses for donations of money, equipment or materials. [Click here to link to the Reference Section of this guide for some specific funding sources.](#)

Getting Started



A project plan was presented to a local supplier who, in turn, provided his support to this school garden with the donation of the cement garden wall blocks.

Be professional in your approach; clearly state what materials or help are needed. Take a project folder to leave with each business if the contact person is unavailable.

The project folder should include:

- An endorsement letter from the director, principal or coordinator stating that the garden project is well organized and has their full support.
- One-page project description.
- List of people supporting the project.
- List of specific needs.
- A garden plan.
- Quotes and/or drawings by participants.

Always involve the students in your plans. Encourage students to show their appreciation by writing thank you notes to donors.

Getting Started

Fundraising Projects

Involve your students in any number of fund raising activities to get the garden started such as,

- Sell garden products: seedlings, houseplants, floral arrangements, and wreaths.
- Hold special events: hold fall and spring plant sales, donated garden tools, and used books.
- Design and sell a T-shirt, hat or bag with the school garden logo.

Donations of Materials and Goods

Have students list the needs and possible sources. Work with them to develop a list of resources and contacts. Encourage students to bring seeds or plants from home.



At this school, families made contributions to fund the cost to build raised beds. The family names were carved into the raised bed edging to recognize their contribution to the school garden.

Donation sources might include:

- Local garden center - discarded plants, seeds, containers
- Local contractors - lumber for borders, stakes, tool sheds, boxes, trellises, fences, seed flats, compost bins
- Hardware stores - tools, old or discontinued styles
- Yard sales and thrift stores - bargain items
- City maintenance departments, private tree trimming companies or utility companies for wood chips and mulch for beds/paths
- School cafeteria - fruit and vegetable scraps for compost piles (check

Getting Started

- school regulations on disposal of food scraps)
- Fencing companies, pool or landscape contractors - donations
- Wholesale seed companies - free catalogs

Volunteer Recruitment, Training and Recognition

Every successful garden project requires committed volunteers. They become involved for a variety of reasons: to meet new people, to “make a difference” by contributing to their community or to accompany their children who are already involved in the project.

The major components of any volunteer management program are:

- Identify and recruit people who have the interest essential to accomplish the goals of the program.
- Select and place volunteers in roles that will match their skills and availability with the program’s needs.
- Orient volunteers to the overall goals of the project.
- Train volunteers in specific skills, knowledge, and goals of the project.
- Recognize and appreciate their contributions.
- Evaluate performance; provide useful feedback.

Key training concepts to communicate to the volunteers might include:

- Involve the students in the decision making such as which seeds to plant, where to plant, etc. Make it “their” garden.
- Make each student special. Complement openly and correct in private. Recognize good behavior, good ideas, good work, etc.
- Assign tasks or discuss the work to be done in the classroom before going into the garden. Be very clear in assigning work teams and tasks.
- Don’t assume that children know or remember garden techniques that have not been fully explained more than once or that have not been demonstrated. Children learn best by hands on work.
- Don’t yell for attention in the garden. Do not speak until all are attentive. Do not talk to the backs of heads.
- Young children may tire easily both physically and mentally. Don’t overwhelm them with things to do.
- Make the garden a place for serious work and for fun things to do. You need to have fun to make it fun for the children.

Getting Started



Some creative ways to thank volunteers are:

- Awards ceremony in the garden with the children present
- Articles in the school and local newspaper
- A lunch or dinner in their honor
- Thank you notes from the principal, parents, PTA and children
- Share pictures of children and volunteers involved in the garden project

Volunteer Tasks and Sources

Possible volunteer tasks are:

- Organize a parent/student workday on Saturday
- Help build raised beds
- Install irrigation lines/timer
- Lay brick/blocks/stepping stones
- Help build a storage shed
- Design a garden bulletin board or newsletter
- Plan a harvest festival

Volunteer sources might include:

- Parents, grandparents, and community members
- Local scouting groups
- High schools, service groups, and local garden clubs
- Farm Bureau and farmer's markets
- Nurseries and garden centers
- Senior centers
- Master Gardeners