



5 A Day and School-Age Children

School Gardens

School gardens are effective learning tools that create opportunities for our children to discover fresh food, make healthier food choices and become better nourished. Gardens also offer dynamic, beautiful settings in which to integrate every discipline, including science, math, reading, environmental studies, nutrition and health. There are many types of plants that can be grown in a garden including those that produce edible fruits and vegetables. The following tips will help you get started with your own project.

Organize a Garden Committee and Support Base

- Include administration, teachers, parents and students in the planning process.
- Get permission before planning to plant a garden on school property.
- Define specific talents and expertise of each member of the committee and support group. List specific needs/wants and have individuals commit to those areas.
- Establish a projects list, realistic timeline for completion of tasks and specific objectives for students in the garden. Visit successful school gardens to get ideas and ask questions.
- Enlist the expertise of your county's Cooperative Extension Service or a Master Gardener Program.

Select a Garden Site

- A good site is easily accessible, receives direct sunlight for 6 to 7 hours daily, is clear of trees and roots and has good water drainage.
- Check for proximity of water source.
- Call local utilities and school district for existence and location of underground utilities.

Design Your Garden

- Start small to develop a general feel for the garden. Things to consider include: individual class beds, theme gardens, a tool shed, a green house and fencing.
- Sketch out a plan for the entire area including: beds for annual crops of vegetables and flowers; theme gardens for butterfly and larval plants; medicinal and culinary herbs; teas; edible flowers; an orchard area; permanent areas to include native plants and berry patches (habitats for birds, insects, snakes and frogs).
- Be sure to include composting and worm bins, a tool shed, benches and a shaded outdoor classroom. If necessary, divide the project into phases as funds and energy permit.
- Make sure paths are wheelchair accessible - 36" wide.

Determine Cost of Labor and Materials

- Organic planting mix for raised planters. Multiply bed length times width times depth in feet and divide by 27 to get number of cubic yards of soil needed.

- Soil amendments for in-ground planting. Add 4 to 6 inches of compost to well-dug soil and mix with existing soil.
- Hardware cloth ($\frac{1}{4}$ inch wire mesh) to line raised beds where moles are a problem.
- Wood chips or other materials for garden paths. Most tree companies are glad to donate chips.
- Irrigation components and controllers. You can use simple, non-electrical timers, or battery operated controllers, costing \$20-\$30 and \$40-\$50 respectively.
- Seeds and plants.
- Suggested Tool List (minimum): Small trowels - one per student; watering cans; 3-4 shovels; 3-4 turning forks; wheelbarrow; small buckets; 1-2 hoes; 1-2 rakes; plant labels are a good art project; hoses and gentle spray nozzles.

Fundraising

- Determine start-up and maintenance costs, and what funds are immediately available. Is there a system established with the school regarding accounting?
- Determine who will keep track of the budget.
- Make a list of needed items and a list of possible local resources - PTA, parents, local vendors.
- Obtain a list of grant proposals; determine who will research, write and facilitate the grant.

Garden

- Schedule and publicize community work days, with rain dates if necessary; follow up with a phone tree.
- Have students make posters to put around school with work dates.
- For building projects, identify an experienced carpenter or builder in the group to organize workers.
- Identify those with plumbing, electrical and irrigation knowledge and skills. Ask volunteers to bring needed tools including saws, hammers, post hole diggers, wheelbarrows, shovels, spades, pickaxes, digging bars and spading forks (depending on tasks being done).
- Remove any unwanted current vegetation from the garden site. Move native plants or current landscaping to another appropriate site on school grounds. *DO NOT USE HERBICIDES* of any kind to kill weeds. They are toxic not only to weeds, but also to our watersheds and our children!
- If mole/vole control is needed, install $\frac{1}{4}$ " hardware cloth 12 inches deep for in-ground planting or use raised planters with $\frac{1}{4}$ " hardware cloth on bottom. If planting directly in the ground, turn over soil to a depth of 18", adding 4" to 6" of soil amendments as needed (based on soil type). If constructing raised planters, fill with organic planting mix.
- Install drip irrigation system and controller. Spread wood chips or other material on garden paths.
- Build fence and gate; install sign.
- Contact your local Cooperative Extension agency for advice on appropriate plants, planting schedules, seeds and seedling sources.
- Have students start planting. Make sure that the students are involved in each step of the process whenever possible!
- **MOST IMPORTANT - Have Fun!**