

planning your school garden



After identifying the need for a garden at your school and recognizing the benefits a gardening program will provide, it is time to begin to make your vision a reality. This book will guide you through the basic steps of creating and maintaining a school garden, including:

- › Seeking administrative approval
- › Creating a support network
- › Identifying goals and linking the garden to your curriculum
- › Designing the garden
- › Identifying supply needs and funding needs
- › Obtaining supplies and funds
- › Planting the garden
- › Maintaining the garden
- › Sustaining the garden

STEP 1: Seeking Administrative Approval

Your first step is to gain the support of your school's administrators. Before setting up a meeting, take time to develop an outline of your vision. Begin your outline with ideas for how you can incorporate the garden into the standards-based curriculum as a hands-on interdisciplinary teaching tool, which is a make-or-break element in receiving approval. Also include the ways you think the garden will benefit your students and the community, a list of potential supporters, and a tentative plan of action, including the steps you will take to create a school garden (you can use this chapter as your plan). Developing a thoughtful and professional outline will indicate your level of commitment to the project and will inspire confidence in your proposal.



For most educators, the principal's office will be the first stop. An enthusiastic and supportive principal is key to the development of your school garden, whether approving and arranging teacher time for workshops, or finding and tapping funding sources. Your principal can also be an important promoter of the garden project to your school district and community. It is essential that the principal be an active participant in the process.

Other school administrators can also play an important role. Seek your principal's guidance on additional contacts, who may include your superintendent, school board members or other local government officials, and even state and federal legislators. It's worth your while to gain their support and approval from the start. They love to be involved and associated with innovative programs, and their support can translate into tangible and intangible contributions.



STEP 2: Creating a Support Network

Once you have a green light from your administrators, it is time to develop your support network. You will quickly find that garden programs are more work than one person can sustain, so to ensure success, enlist other teachers, school staff, students, parents, and community volunteers to serve on a garden planning and advisory team (*which we will refer to as the “garden team”*). Members of this team can help you set goals and can provide ideas for ways to integrate the garden into the curriculum. They may promote the program to other parents and community members, secure necessary supplies, provide horticultural expertise, assist with classroom lessons (*it is often helpful to have an extra set of hands during classroom gardening projects*), or aid in maintenance of the garden. By gathering input and help from a diverse group, you will strengthen the creativity and ingenuity of your program. Their involvement will multiply your resources and create active supporters for your efforts.

Before asking people to be a part of the garden team, envision how you would like them to participate and what their responsibilities will be. How often and when would you like to meet? Do you want them to help in planning, implementing, or maintaining the garden, or help in all stages? Even though roles may shift during the life of the garden, always try to communicate needs and expectations clearly.

Not all members of this team need to contribute in the same way. Although it is easier on you to find individuals willing to help with all aspects, you will probably find more people willing to take on responsibilities that build on their individual strengths and fit their available time. An important volunteer to look for is someone willing to serve as a garden coordinator to help organize communication, scheduling, and other details. Because of the demands of this position, you may want to recruit two or three people to share this job. Your garden coordinators will help support you as the garden program grows in size and scope. Look for individuals who are good at delegating responsibilities and following up to make sure jobs are completed. It is best not to have coordinators who want to control all the work because they will deter other volunteers and are likely to burn out. Many successful school gardens are fortunate enough to find funding to pay a garden coordinator.

Begin building your network by conducting a brainstorming session with potential supporters. Spread the word by presenting the project idea at a faculty, school board, or PTO meeting and inviting people to join the brainstorming session. Send an email invitation to the entire school community. Notify other community members of the upcoming session by hanging posters, sending out a newsletter, or placing announcements through local newspapers, radio, or television. Promote the meeting on the school website.

At this first meeting, present your initial vision for the school garden and the role the garden support team will play, and then develop a list of people interested in serving on the garden team. Many times people are hesitant to sign up through large meetings, so you will want to follow up with personal invitations to individuals you feel would make valuable members of the team.

Get as many people involved in the project as you can. The larger the project, the larger the support network you need. The more people involved, the more likely it is that your program will be successful, because the weight of the project will not rest on one individual. Make sure to involve anyone who may have a direct stake in your program, such as neighbors whose property will abut the garden, local garden club members, and green industry employees. It is important to contact these key players early in the planning stages to establish a feeling of “ownership.” When people are involved in the decision making and active in the upkeep, they are usually more supportive and less likely to get bored and quit.

Create a group of people who will work well together and invest the time, energy, and patience to accomplish their goals. The committee should be composed of focused individuals who are willing to meet regularly and share in the responsibility of actually getting the garden started. Potential team members include:

Teachers. Involving other teachers in garden efforts is very important. Teachers are valuable contributors because they have a firm understanding of curricular goals, know your students well, and have access to school facilities and supplies. Additionally, it’s more fun to approach the garden as a teaching team, and it takes the burden off one educator to keep the program alive.

Maintenance Staff. Many teachers have noted that a good relationship with the custodian is critical to a successful garden program. The custodian can help you find valuable resources like storage closets and water sources. Also, because the maintenance staff frequently works year-round, they can help keep an eye on gardens during breaks and vacations. Include your maintenance staff in early planning discussions, especially those related to garden location. If these staff members are involved in the planning process, they will feel ownership of the program and will be less likely to view it as an inconvenience or an unnecessary addition to their workload.

Food Service Staff. Food service staff may be able to provide resources to aid in food preparation for nutrition lessons. Also, lunchroom scraps can provide excellent materials for your compost pile.





Students. Teachers across the country have discovered that when students are involved in all stages of the process, they are more invested in the project's success and inspired to care for and respect their schoolyard oases. By valuing students' opinions and encouraging them to make decisions, educators cultivate motivated, confident, and collaborative learners. Teachers say that although relinquishing some control and inviting students into the decision-making process isn't necessarily easier or more efficient, it is always rewarding.

Parents. Parents will be enthusiastic about any program designed to provide additional learning experiences for their children and will have a strong stake in the success of your program. You may find a parent with a horticultural background who can provide expertise, or a parent with excellent organizational skills willing to serve as a volunteer coordinator. Parents often have connections to funding and supplies, as well.

Community Volunteers. Additional community members add depth to your program and open up new opportunities for resources. Look for volunteers with garden experience and ties to the horticulture industry. In addition to providing connections to necessary supplies, they may be willing to provide technical advice, for example, diagnosing problems and leading special garden activities or workshops. Contact local farmers along with public and private organizations related to the agriculture industry. Gardens are like small farms, and agriculture professionals have a lot of knowledge and materials to share. Community volunteers might include garden club members, college students enrolled in plant sciences or education programs, botanic garden staff or volunteers, plant nursery staff, landscape designers or architects, and Cooperative Extension Service Master Gardeners.

Don't forget your school's neighbors! Your garden is more than an addition to your school; it also affects the neighborhood. The neighbors can help keep an eye on it when school is not in session. They might also be willing to help with summer maintenance and weekend watering.

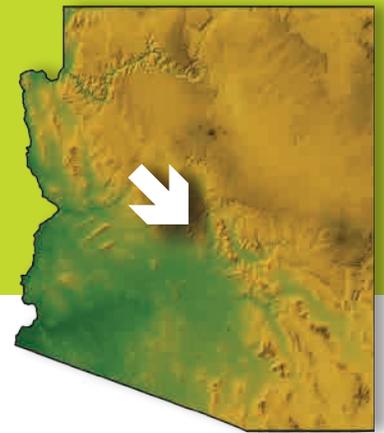
It takes time and energy to develop your support network, but it is worth the effort. Involving the school and the local community in a schoolyard project:

- 】 Promotes project sustainability because responsibilities don't fall entirely on the shoulders of one champion
- 】 Decreases the likelihood of vandalism because more people have a stake in the success of the program
- 】 Provides connections to potential volunteers and donors of labor, plants, money, and supplies
- 】 Encourages cross-generational mentoring and friendships among students, teachers, and a diversity of community members
- 】 Brings needed expertise and fresh ideas to the project

Chapter 10, Working with Volunteers, has more information on involving volunteers in your garden.

program spotlight

Lettuce, Spinach, Tomatoes, Onions, Garden Beans, Radishes, Cabbage, Marigolds



Paradise Valley Christian, Phoenix, AZ

A Garden Comes to Life

How the lettuce experience fueled the body and minds of the students

Ms. Downs's third grade students were delighted to come back to class with an actual real life head of lettuce grown in their school's garden. Having just left their hands-on garden experience, the children came back to class eager to share ideas and thoughts. There was a big root that they hadn't seen before that "felt like a finger" and the little roots that "felt like hair." "Why does lettuce have different kinds of roots?" Ms. Downs asked the class.

"To take in water!" Said a student.

"To keep the lettuce in the soil!"

"To suck up nutrients!"

"All great answers," said Ms. Downs. "Now let's taste our lettuce." After washing the lettuce, Ms. Downs offered students a leaf to eat. Several asked for seconds.

"We want to accentuate our existing programs, including our science program," said Head Master Sheryl Temple. "We created a living classroom for all our grades."

Parent involvement has also been a key to success for the school garden. Hans Berglund's daughter attends Paradise Valley Christian and he helped fund the school garden program. Berglund, who is President/CEO at Agroplasma Inc. and a member of WGA, matched the garden grant and helped build 20-garden beds. Another parent, Bill Jacoby, helped with the landscaping.

"As a parent I was intrigued by looking at the WGA website's motto," said Berglund. 'If they grow it, they will eat it.' The school garden enforces this motto." The process of planting, growing, and eating has introduced to the students the learning of caring for yourself and your community. It has also brought the ideas home to the dinner table.

"We also have a home garden and my daughter eats a plate of fruits and vegetable each night," said Berglund.

With students, teachers, and parents involved with the Paradise Valley Christian school garden, a successful learning experience is in progress.



STEP 3: Identifying Goals and Linking the Garden to Your Curriculum

The first job of your garden team is to identify goals for the school garden. Your goals must tie in with your current curriculum – the garden is a tool to help you accomplish your learning objectives, not an added task for your workload. Begin your team’s goal-setting meeting by sharing information about required academic standards, then brainstorm ways to accomplish these learning objectives through garden lessons. Use these questions as a guide:

- › What topics do you want to teach through the garden?
- › What plants do you want to grow?
- › Do you want to use the garden once a year for an in-depth special study or incorporate it into a yearlong interdisciplinary curriculum?
- › Do you want to develop the garden around a central theme or create small garden areas with multiple themes?
- › Which classes will be involved in the garden? Do they want their own gardening space?

When setting goals, remember to start small and leave room to dream. You can accomplish this by setting both short-term and long-term goals. For instance, you may want to create a butterfly garden in a half-acre courtyard at the school. Make it a multiyear project and break it into stages to keep the work at a manageable level, so that you don’t exhaust the enthusiasm of your students and volunteers early on by preparing soil and removing weeds on a large area. In addition, this method allows for project growth each year, adding momentum to your efforts and creating feelings of ownership from new participants.

After your brainstorming sessions, make sure to get your goals into writing. Create a summary document and distribute it to all the participants. Also share your plans with other teachers, administrators, and community members. This document will help to raise awareness of your new project, spreading excitement and anticipation.

STEP 4: Designing the Garden

With goals in hand, you are ready to design your garden. The garden design should be practical, functional, and fun! Involve your students and garden team in the process. A school garden can be as small as a few containers in a courtyard or as large as a 10-bed vegetable garden in the playground. Chapter 5, *Designing Your School Garden*, will walk you through the steps of designing your garden.

STEP 5: Identifying Supply Needs and Funding Needs

Before you begin searching for financial support and donations, make a list of materials and supplies needed. Estimate the costs for the entire project and prepare a realistic budget. Remember to include expenses for the site



development and improvement, operation, curriculum, and miscellaneous items. If you skip this step and do not take time to organize your efforts, you might end up with an abundance of supplies, but still be missing key items. Chapter 6, Finding Supplies and Funding Your Garden, gives detailed information on this important aspect of school garden projects.

STEP 6: Obtaining Supplies and Funds

Once you've accurately identified what your garden project needs, you're ready to take the next step to meet those needs. Finding the resources to implement your vision may be a challenge, but it is also an opportunity to get more of your community actively involved and invested in your program. Most schools find funding and supplies through donations, grants, and fundraising projects. Chapter 6, Finding Supplies and Funding Your Garden, will guide you through this process.

STEP 7: Planting the Garden

The most exciting part of the process is always Planting Day. Watching a landscape design turn into a garden energizes students and adults. Chapter 7, Planting Your School Garden, will walk you through the basics of garden installation, including preparing the soil, laying out the design, and digging in.

STEP 8: Maintaining the Garden

Students learn about nurturing and responsibility when they participate in garden maintenance. Chapter 8, Maintaining Your School Garden, provides an overview of basic maintenance tasks. However, care will vary greatly depending on the size of the garden, the plants in it, and its environment.

STEP 9: Sustaining the Garden

There is more to continuing your garden than keeping the plants alive. Considering the time and resources invested, your garden program should serve as an education tool for this year's students and for students using it 10 years from now. You also should create a positive garden experience for all participants. Chapter 9 provides tips from experienced school garden educators on how to sustain your garden efforts, including ideas for outdoor classroom management and communicating success.

This guidebook concludes with a resource section to aid you in beginning your school garden. Even though having a garden teaching tool is the ultimate goal, remember that each step of this process provides valuable learning experiences for you and your students. Don't get bogged down in the details – enjoy the adventures along the way!

