

finding supplies and funding your garden

For those planning youth gardens, there is never a shortage of ideas for programs and activities. But do you find the room quiets when the topic switches to funding the project? The good news is that a gardening program does not need to be huge to be successful – students can learn as much from a 4- by 8-foot raised bed as from a half-acre plot. But even on a small scale, your gardening program will need basic supplies like soil, tools, and plants, of course. So where can you go to find these materials?

Finding the resources necessary to begin and maintain a youth garden is always a challenge, but it does not need to be a roadblock. Think of your funding search as an opportunity to provide additional community members a chance to participate in an extraordinary and powerful youth program. Search out people and organizations who share your love for children and who can benefit from being a part of your success.

IDENTIFY SUPPLY AND MATERIAL NEEDS

First and foremost, do not search for funds until you complete the preliminary planning and design steps. Donors and funding organizations want to invest in long-term ventures and will look carefully at your support network and plans for implementation to determine whether your program will last. Create a firm foundation before you gather the supplies to build.

Once you have in place a garden team, a set of clear goals, and a design, develop a list of resources needed to implement the program. Although miscellaneous needs will arise, you should be able to develop a detailed list of the supplies and materials you will need to make your garden a reality. Make sure to estimate your needs as accurately as possible. Remember to include expenses for the site development and improvement, operation, curriculum, and miscellaneous items. Why is this list so important? You don't want to be missing important supplies that delay garden implementation, nor do you want to end up with supplies you cannot use. A vague request for supplies for a new school garden could result in 10 garden hoses and one shovel, when what you really need is 10 shovels and one hose. Having this list in hand as you search for support will also demonstrate the organized and professional nature of your garden and give potential sponsors confidence in both you and the program.

The needs of each garden will vary on the basis of location (indoor versus outdoor), size, number of students participating, and plantings. Common items needed by school gardens follow.



Plants. It is not a garden without plants. Plants may be started from seed, grown from cuttings, or purchased as mature plants. Most classrooms begin their gardens by planting seeds because they are relatively inexpensive, and their growth helps students to visualize the full life cycle of a plant. It is also easy to find donations of seeds from local garden centers or seed companies near the end of the summer because many companies want to get rid of excess stock then. Seed packages are dated, and even though most garden centers and seed companies will not sell seed with older dates, packets kept in a cool and dry location will have high germination rates for many years.

Curriculum Books and Resources. There are a lot of solid resources available to aid you in this process. A list of resources is included on page 84. A detailed, prewritten curriculum is especially valuable if you are using volunteers to aid in the teaching process.

Soil and/or Compost. Whether you are gardening in the ground or in containers, you will need rich, high-quality soil and compost for your plants. Many municipalities where green waste is collected give compost and mulch to residents.

Irrigation Supplies. Plants need water. Irrigation supplies include watering cans, hoses, and sprinklers. Experienced gardeners know that automatic irrigation – for instance, drip irrigation systems or sprinklers – is an important asset for school gardens. If you plan to water with watering cans, make sure they are small enough for students to carry when full.

Child-Sized Garden Tools. It is important to use the right tools for the job. Although you may want a few adult-sized tools for parents and volunteers, smaller and more lightweight tools are safer for children to use. When selecting tools, look for durable, well-made, properly sized products. Watch out for donations of poorly maintained or unsafe garden tools. Examples of tools you may need: hoes, rakes, digging forks, digging spades, shovels, hand trowels, hand cultivators, buckets, and a wheelbarrow or garden cart.

Child-Sized Gloves. Soil is teeming with life, which is important for the health of your plants. However, it may also include organisms or trash items that are not beneficial for your students. Gloves help protect students from sharp rocks or trash buried in the soil and prevent undesirable organisms from getting under fingernails or into cuts.



Tuscon Village Farm





Fertilizer. Even with the most fertile soil, your plants will probably need additional fertilizer for healthy growth. Let the soil test results from your site analysis and the plants' needs be your guide. Nutrients may be added by applications of compost, organic fertilizers like fish emulsion, or synthetic fertilizers like slow-release pellets. Always read and follow the warning labels on fertilizer products and store in a secure location. All fertilizers should be handled by adults or under close adult supervision.

Garden Stakes and Row Markers. Label your plants to keep track of what, where, and when you plant. Although at the time of planting, you may think you will remember this without writing it down, once you expand your garden and begin different classroom experiments, it is easy to forget.

Mulch. Outdoor gardens benefit from the addition of two to three inches of mulch added to the soil. The mulch helps to slow water loss from evaporation, moderate soil temperatures, decrease soil erosion, and decrease the spread of soilborne diseases. There are a number of different materials you can use as mulch, including shredded wood, straw, plastic, and newspaper. Many tree service companies will donate wood chip mulch to worthy projects such as school gardens.

Money. Sometimes there are items or services you will need funds for, such as renting a tiller or paying a water bill. Also, you may run into miscellaneous expenses that you did not originally anticipate. It helps to have a small amount of cash available to your garden project to accommodate fees and surprise expenses.

Once you have a list of needs, where do you begin your search? First, determine whether or not your school or school district has internal supply funds to help with your program. Internal funding may be limited, but it never hurts to try; after all, you are competing for funds with a smaller number of people. Next, look for additional local resources within your community. Businesses like to support local initiatives because it helps them strengthen their ties to the community, closely track the progress of their investment, and reap public relations benefits from their generosity. For instance, a garden business that donates plants hopes the students' parents will acknowledge the investment made in their children and respond by shopping at that store. After looking locally, expand your search to regional, state, and national opportunities.

Most school gardens use three main approaches to seek funds: donations, grants, and fundraising projects. You will probably want to use a combination of these strategies to secure the funds needed to begin and maintain your garden program.



DONATIONS

Seeking donations is a task that many people dread because they often hear “no” numerous times before getting a “yes.” Before you begin your quest, create project folders for your school garden that you can take with you and leave with each potential donor. The folders will show that your effort is well organized and that the program has the full support of the school administration. The project folder does not need to be flashy, but should include an enthusiastic endorsement letter from the director, principal, or coordinator; a one-page project description; a garden plan; a list of people who support the project; a list of garden needs; and personal appeals like quotes or drawings from students.

Here is a list of tips to make sure your donation search is rewarding rather than frustrating:

- ▶ Begin with the parents of your youth. They are strongly invested in your program and may be able to donate the items you need or may have community connections that can fulfill your needs. Reach parents in parent volunteer meetings, school newsletters, and email appeals.
- ▶ Identify potential donors by matching your needs with their services and products. Meet with potential donors in person, if possible.
- ▶ Know the tax status of your school or organization and the name businesses should use when making out checks.
- ▶ Businesses receive requests for donations all the time, so be professional and organized. Ask only for appropriate amounts of cash and specific materials.
- ▶ Remember that businesses need to sell their products and make a profit to survive. Be ready to tell them why they should invest in your school garden project and how you will recognize them if they do support it.
- ▶ Money may be the first gift that comes to mind, but other donations can be just as valuable. These may include plants and seeds, lumber, soil, amendments, fencing, tools, release time for employees who wish to participate, and in-kind gifts like use of equipment.
- ▶ Acknowledge all donations, large and small, in the form of notes, posters, banners, and so on. Include students in the acknowledgment process.
- ▶ If you do not like to ask for donations, find someone on your garden team who is more comfortable doing so. Donors pick up on hesitation and are more likely to say “no” to a person who lacks enthusiasm and confidence.

When people say “no,” accept it gracefully and thank them for their time. Who knows? They may change their mind or you may need to approach them about other opportunities in the future.



GRANTS

A number of grants are available that provide money and materials to help fund youth gardens.

Grants generally require completion of an application, and may or may not result in funds being awarded. Grants come from a number of sources, including public funds (local, state, and federal government) and private funds from foundations (general, community, corporate, family), corporations, and other resources.

Here are a few tips for finding and applying for grants:

- › Find grants with requirements that match your needs.
- › Do your homework. Research the programs supported in the past and the current priorities of the organization.
- › Submit a professional application, making sure to follow all instructions, answer questions thoroughly, keep text concise and meaningful, and provide as much detail as possible, including plans for sustainability.
- › Ask someone to proofread your application before you submit it.
- › Make sure the application is easy to understand. If you handed it to a stranger, would he or she be able to translate your goals and purpose?
- › Submit the application before the deadline.

FUNDRAISING

If you've already got a school garden, using garden projects to raise money not only provides funds for future expansion or special projects, but also provides students with business experience. Fundraising projects can be used to prepare students for a career in horticulture, engage students in authentic problem-solving challenges, involve students in educating the public, help students develop positive job-related or social skills, teach economics and math, help revitalize a community, and build school/community partnerships.

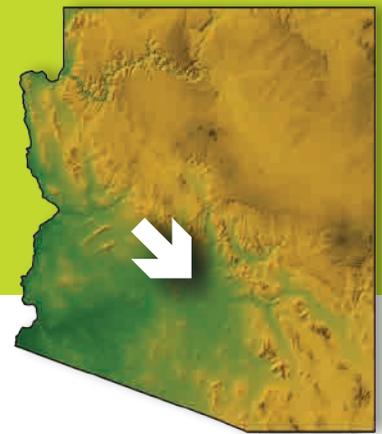
Here are a few fundraising ideas:

- › Plant and sell vegetable, herb, or flower seedlings.
- › Create and sell craft projects from the garden, such as potpourri, pressed flower stationery, or dried flower arrangements.
- › Sell cut flowers or blooming potted plants for special occasions.
- › Save and package seeds to sell.
- › Make an edible product like salsa or jelly.
- › Host a silent auction or raffle. Combine with a dinner or special event like a garden tour.



program spotlight

Okra, Corn, Green Beans, Red Beans, Broccoli, Brussel Sprouts, Beets, Radishes, Onions, Carrots, Cabbage, Lettuce, Cucumbers, Squash, Bell Peppers, Peppers, Herbs, Tomatoes



Vista Grove Prep Academy, Mesa, AZ

The Farmers Market From Seed to Stomach

“We had a parent five years ago donate a raised garden box because she wanted to see green on campus and see the kids gardening like they did back in her homeland of Japan,” said Chris Cafaro who oversees the garden program at Vista Grove Prep Academy, a K-8 school. Today over 100 students are involved with the garden program. Cafaro teaches 5th grade and incorporates his science lessons with garden teachings.

Over five years later, the garden is now full of six raised garden boxes full of blossoming plants. The garden has arrived at this point through years of work and support from the community. The boxes and mulch were all donated and funding has helped support the garden.

“The kids helped build this garden and pounded nails with the hammer to build the boxes,” said Cafaro.

Cafaro has become a sort of local gardening guru and helped other people in the community build their own home gardens. He has also found a great location at Vista Grove Prep Academy where the pollination season is intense and allows for several varieties of sustainable growth. The result is a phenomenal growing garden.

Teaching the students where their food comes from is the theme of the garden at Vista Grove. For Cafaro, he wanted to make a point that the food at the grocery store doesn't grow at the grocery store. His goal is placing a coral on campus and having chickens for a functioning farm and developing a farmers market on campus.

“I'd like the students to understand the self-sustainability of gardening and farming,” said Cafaro.

With the students, teachers, staff, and community involved, this garden has the support needed to keep growing long into the future.

“We've been blessed by so many people in the community to help with the garden over the years,” said Cafaro. “The garden brings a lot of smiles and it's a lot of fun for the kids.”



- › Hold a spring garden sale with plants started by students or donated by local gardeners and nurseries.

Before organizing a fundraising event, seek approval from school administrators. Also, check with governmental offices to see if you will need a special license (such as a nursery license or food handlers' license). Finally, before the event takes place, establish financially sound procedures for handling and depositing money.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

It is extremely important to follow up with your donors not only to show appreciation, but also to update them on your progress. If you create a sense of involvement in the program, they will want to contribute again in the future.

Many grants require submission of an annual report. Make sure you know and complete all the requirements. Regardless of the requirements, however, when you receive a donation or grant (no matter how small) make sure that you send a thank you note written either by you or by one of the students involved in the program. Some additional ideas for follow-up:

- › Post a sign or plaque in your garden recognizing all contributors.
- › Plan a formal dedication ceremony for new gardens to recognize contributors and involve the community.
- › Create a website so donors can track progress. Include an acknowledgment of their contribution on your site.
- › Send a regular print or email newsletter.
- › Send a card with an update on progress, such as a “First Day of Spring” card.
- › Host a garden party and invite all funders and sponsors to participate.
- › Recognize contributions in a school newsletter or newspaper article.
- › Create small gifts from the garden to give, such as a basket of fresh vegetables or potpourri from dried flowers.

These tips should help as you search for support for your school garden program. Also remember your “C’s” – be creative, clear, concise, concrete, consistent, complete, cohesive, compelling, confident, convincing, and competent. Finding supplies and securing funding are activities you will engage in not only at the beginning of your school gardening pursuits, but also continuously to help sustain your garden (see Chapter 9, Sustaining Your Garden, for more information). A positive attitude will serve you well in your pursuit.

