



CULTIVATING NUTRITION & LEARNING
THROUGH IDAHO SCHOOL GARDENS



How to Get Started

There are several important steps to take before you start building your school garden. These include obtaining permission from school administrators, communicating with other school staff members, and creating a support network to work as a team on the school garden.

IMPORTANT TOPICS TO DISCUSS WITH YOUR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR(S):

- Find out who has the authority to approve the use of the land for the school garden; this varies at each district (this can range from the school principal to the school board).
- Let school administration know how many classes, students, teachers, etc. will be involved in the garden, the resources you plan to use, and how much class time you estimate will be spent in the garden.
- Make sure the administration is aware of the positive impact school gardens can have on the students' academic performance and overall health. Keep track of the positive impact your school garden is having on your students.
- Invite school administrators to be involved in the planning and implementation of the school garden.

THE SCHOOL MAINTENANCE DEPARTMENT IS AN IMPORTANT PARTNER IN SCHOOL GARDENS

- Inform the maintenance supervisor of the location of the proposed garden site.
- Find out where you will have access to water and if you can use that water for the garden. It is also helpful to find

Possible Partners for School Gardens:

- ▶ Garden, plant and flower clubs and organizations
- ▶ Land trusts, environmental and conservation groups
- ▶ Scouts
- ▶ Seniors & Senior Centers
- ▶ 4-H Clubs
- ▶ FFA programs
- ▶ Boys and Girls clubs
- ▶ Church groups
- ▶ Colleges & Universities
- ▶ Hospitals and Health Care Facilities

Site Location Criteria Checklist

- ▶ **Access:** is the site located near those who will be using it most?
- ▶ **Soil Quality:** is the soil loose enough to hold seeds and compact enough to hold water?
- ▶ **Safety:** is the site safe from vandalism, dogs, foot traffic, etc.
- ▶ **Size:** does the site have space for a large number of children, tools, and activities?
- ▶ **Sunlight:** does the site receive at least eight hours of sun per day?
- ▶ **Water:** is there access to potable water nearby?
- ▶ **Availability:** is the site available now and can it remain available in future years and throughout different seasons?

out if sprinklers that water the lawn in the summer will also cover the garden area.

- Clarify that the garden will be maintained by volunteers, students, and teaching staff and will not create more work for maintenance.

WHERE TO LOOK FOR HELP AND ASSISTANCE

- Students can be great recruiters. Let them know what you need; they may have a parent, relative, or sibling that has just the right expertise or interest.
- Parents may have resources that will help you in building and maintaining your garden. Put a list of needs in school newsletters and the local paper. You may be surprised by how much help you get.
- Contact community and youth groups to partner on the garden. For example: the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, Chambers of Commerce, Lions Clubs, senior communities, etc.
- Ask local businesses to donate supplies or manpower. Many local building supply companies are willing to donate to school garden programs.
- Partner with the college extension services in your area. Almost every county in Idaho has University of Idaho Extension offices that can help with gardening questions and can sometimes offer classes to your students. To find your local extension agent, visit <http://www.extension.uidaho.edu/find.asp>.



Common Garden Tasks Throughout The Year

There are several tasks that will need to take place throughout the school year and the summer in order to have a successful school garden program. The list below provides some general tasks that will need to be completed each season. Make sure to include your students in as many of these tasks as possible so they can experience the entire garden process.

Fall

- ▶ Plant and harvest fall vegetable crops
- ▶ Gather leaves for composting
- ▶ Remove summer crops
- ▶ Plant cover crops
- ▶ Mulch to provide protection against winter weather

Winter

- ▶ Plan the spring garden
- ▶ Start seeds indoors
- ▶ Prune fruit trees and perennial shrubs

Spring

- ▶ Clean out winter debris
- ▶ Prepare soil for planting
- ▶ Transplant seedlings
- ▶ Direct sow seeds
- ▶ Harvest spring vegetables

Summer

- ▶ Plant summer vegetables or prepare garden for summer break
- ▶ Schedule volunteers to help with summer care
- ▶ Keep weeds under control
- ▶ Harvest vegetables

What to Do During Summer Break

Gardens are usually plentiful in the summer, but can also require a lot of work. So what do you do when school is out for the summer?

There are a variety of options; if you are creative, your summer garden can be a huge success.

- ▶ Focus on planting cool weather crops that produce fruit when school is in session in order to involve the students in the harvesting as much as possible.
- ▶ Involve summer school students in the school garden.
- ▶ Create an "Adopt a Garden" program. Allow families to adopt a section of the garden or a garden bed for the summer. The family gets the benefit of harvesting and eating the foods they grow during the summer months.
- ▶ Have student clubs take turns taking care of the garden in the summer time. They may be able to sell the produce raised as a fundraiser.
- ▶ Ask partners to help during the summer, for example scouting organizations, daycare centers or other local community programs.
- ▶ Ask for teacher and faculty volunteers and make a rotating schedule of garden summer tasks.

Types of Gardens

RAISED BEDS: Raised beds are elevated garden beds that allow plants to grow on a three- to four-foot wide area. Benefits of a raised bed include: greater food production, less compact soil, and efficient use of compost.

CONTAINER GARDENING: Container Gardens are very commonly used in schools. Almost any type of container can be used for container gardening as long as it holds soil, can drain water, and is large enough to accommodate the plants. Benefits of container gardens include: helps control weeds, garden area stays organized, can be shaped to fit any location, and helps prevent students from walking on plants.

There are options for gardening that can be done in small areas or inside the classroom:

FLOWER BOX GARDEN: garden plants can be included in normal flower boxes or barrels that may be found at the entrance of your building.

HERB GARDEN IN A BAG: herbs such as basil, chive, mint, parsley, sage, and dill can be planted in a medium-sized Ziploc Bag. Fill the bag with potting soil, plant seeds, add a few drops of water and set the bags in a window seal or sunny location.

SALAD IN A BUCKET: a small garden can be grown in any type of bucket. Have students bring in buckets or ask your

foodservice department for leftover buckets. Drill two holes in the bottom of each bucket to help drain water. Plant lettuce, radishes, green onions, and a small patio tomato plant in the bucket. The students can take the buckets outside on sunny days, bring the buckets inside on cold days, and can take the bucket home in the summer.



Fun Ideas and Garden Themes

There are a variety of themes that can be incorporated into school gardens. Below are some examples:

THE THREE SISTERS GARDEN:

The Three Sisters Garden is a traditional Native American garden. The garden consists of corn, beans, and squash. The garden is planted in a ring, symbolizing the unending cycle of life.

NUTRITION EDUCATION GARDEN:

This garden represents the USDA's food pyramid. The garden can be in the shape of a triangle or just simply represent the different food groups in the pyramid in divided sections. Another nutrition focused garden could focus on a particular nutrient, for example Vitamin A.

THE PIZZA GARDEN

Students love pizza gardens, where they can grow a variety of toppings for pizzas. Many schools will grow toppings such as onions, peppers, tomatoes, garlic, oregano, and basil. Allow the students to use the foods grown to make their own personal pizza after harvest.

A CHILD'S GARDEN

This garden is designed for younger children with easy to grow vegetables such as lettuce, spinach, and peas.

THE EARTH GARDEN

This garden contains raised beds in the shape of each of the seven continents. Foods indigenous to each continent in the corresponding container are grown. This allows students to learn geography, agricultural history, economics, and development.

AMERICAN HISTORY GARDEN

Depict different geographic regions and agriculture patterns of the United States. Have students research how growing foods have changed throughout history.



Composting

Composting can be a great activity to include in your school garden. Composting allows schools to recycle paper and food scraps to use in the garden. Composting also is a great opportunity to teach a variety of scientific processes. Organic matter in the form of compost will help replenish nutrients and improve soil structure in your garden.

COMPOSTING REQUIRES THREE BASIC INGREDIENTS:

1. Brown Materials: dried leaves, dried grass, etc
2. Green Materials: grass clippings, vegetable waste, fruit scraps, garden leftovers, and coffee grounds
3. Water

How to Build a Homemade Compost Tumbler

One of the keys to composting is aeration. A compost tumbler is inexpensive to make and simplifies this process. All you have to do is turn the tumbler to mix and aerate your compost. There are a variety of ways to build a compost tumbler. One example is below.

1. Find a 45-55 gallon plastic barrel. Make sure the barrel is "food grade" and has not held any toxic materials. You may have a parent in your school who will have a barrel to donate.
2. Cut a door in the barrel, large enough to put compost materials into the barrel. Screw hinges on the top side of the door and latches to close the door on the sides and bottom of the door (a variety of types of latches can be found at a hardware store).

3. Drill a couple of ½ inch holes in the barrel on the side opposite from the door to help with ventilation and drainage.
4. Attach handles on the barrel to help in turning the barrel.
5. To build the base that the compost barrel will sit on, attach four caster wheels to a platform (or to two 4x4s). Space the wheels far enough apart so they keep the barrel rolling. If the wheels are too far apart, the barrel will bottom out when full. If they are too narrow, the barrel will fall off the wheels.

