

# CHECKLIST FOR STARTING A SCHOOL GARDEN



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*School gardens frequently start when one teacher develops a passion for gardening with youth, but school gardens also fail because groundwork is not completed in advance. Before a seed even goes into the soil, educators need to take steps to grow their school garden in more ways than one. The following checklist\* can assist school personnel in starting an educational garden. Keep in mind that the checklist is "big picture" and that you might not need all of these steps. The sections are not in chronological order, overall, with the exception of the first and second page.*

## FIRST STEPS: ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS

- ☐ Do your homework. Run an online search and explore all the positive research on school gardening and what it does for children, and be ready to share that information with stakeholders. Remember also that enthusiasm wins the day! Engage with like-minded colleagues for support
- ☐ Share your vision with administrators in your building, starting with your school principal. This connection is a key first step to bringing your idea to the superintendent and school board, also important advocates for long-term success. Encourage the school board to adopt a formal measure in support of school gardens
- ☐ Survey teachers by assessing their interest in school gardens, then ask them to think of ways that they might use the garden in their curriculum. Also have some ideas on hand that teachers can reference. Let your colleagues know that the garden is going to be a tool for their use, not added work
- ☐ Engage students in the process, including the decision-making and design process. If you have a school garden club, elect officers and schedule regular meetings
- ☐ Involve grounds-keeping staff and maintenance staff in the planning stages
- ☐ Involve nutrition/food service personnel
- ☐ Start to think about who will care for the garden over the summer and decide what parent groups/community members need to be involved
- ☐ Identify a School Garden Coordinator. This can be a paid or unpaid position, although paid is ideal. This person can be recruited from outside of the school, or can be an interested teacher. The job description can include coordinating teaching schedules, care of the garden, purchasing of supplies, managing volunteers, and more



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## ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS (CONTINUED)

- ☐ Set up an advisory committee and meet to introduce the idea of a garden. This can consist of school personnel, a student and parent representative, University Extension personnel/Master Gardener volunteers, food service personnel, Farm to School representatives, greenhouse business personnel, chamber of commerce members, city government officials, and others who might provide support in many ways, both technical and financial. This body will meet only three to four times per year
- ☐ Identify other potential partners such as local restaurant owners, the media, etc.
- ☐ Contact neighbors near the proposed garden as they can serve as volunteers when it comes to monitoring, watering, weeding, etc. to not only let them know what is going on, but to encourage them to become an advocate for the garden
- ☐ Assign someone to serve as a liaison who can communicate to donors, the media, and the community

## VISIONING:

- ☐ Clearly identify the mission of the garden, who it will serve, how it will be used by all stakeholders, and the end goal
- ☐ Bring all stakeholders together for a brainstorming session to rough out a general plan for the garden, including current and future plans. Starting small might, in fact, be the best option in the beginning, but be sure to have goals for participants to strive for in the future

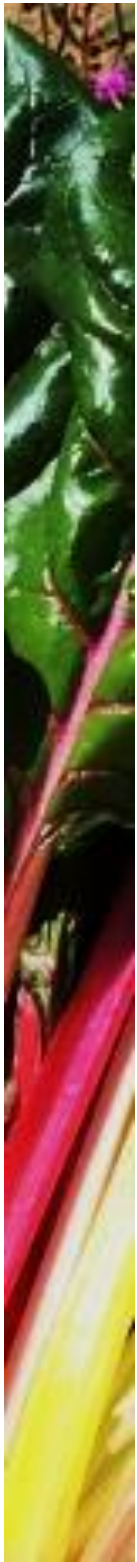
## DETERMINING THE TYPE OF GARDEN BASED ON IDENTIFIED GOALS:

- ☐ Garden to cafeteria for improved nutrition, health and well-being
- ☐ Pollinator garden
- ☐ Theme gardens: history, herb, pizza, heirloom, sensory, vertical
- ☐ Math, science, social studies, literature, art
- ☐ Learning or land lab
- ☐ Vegetables
- ☐ Flowers
- ☐ Native or cultural plants and grasses
- ☐ Fruit trees





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### SELECT GARDEN STRUCTURES/INFRASTRUCTURES FOR USE NOW OR THAT WILL BE INCORPORATED INTO THE GARDEN IN THE FUTURE:

- ☐ Containers
- ☐ Cold frames
- ☐ Raised beds
- ☐ Wheelchair height raised beds
- ☐ Low tunnel/mini-hoop
- ☐ High tunnel/hoop house
- ☐ Greenhouse
- ☐ Materials for aquaponics/hydroponics
- ☐ Tool shed
- ☐ Seating, natural or homemade
- ☐ Water source/water features
- ☐ Trellises/gourd tunnels
- ☐ Fencing if desired
- ☐ Chicken Coop



### VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT:

- ☐ Identify a volunteer coordinator who can secure, schedule, supervise and encourage volunteers
- ☐ Recruit volunteers (school, parents, teachers, students, local groups, community members, neighbors, etc.) Determine jobs and draft job descriptions
- ☐ Have an application with guidelines for background checks
- ☐ Determine a scheduling method
- ☐ Develop a communication system
- ☐ Organize and present a volunteer training with guidelines about working with children, etc.
- ☐ Plan for volunteer recognition; awards

### FUNDRAISING:

- ☐ Research grants online that can be used for school gardening and apply when open; designate a grant writer
- ☐ If not already complete, have the PTO/PTA set up a 501(c)3 to receive grant funds
- ☐ Identify local businesses that can offer goods, services and financial resources
- ☐ Develop school fundraisers to support the garden such as *adopt-a-tomato*, garden logo T-shirts designed by students, etc.



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**BUDGETING:**

- ☐ Soil test services available through University Extension offices
- ☐ Water access and hose; watering cans
- ☐ Garden coordinator/consultant stipend or salary (if offered)
- ☐ Adult and child-sized tools including trowels, shovels, gloves, buckets and more
- ☐ Materials for raised beds
- ☐ Funding for season extension structures, if desired, such as high and low tunnels, cold frames, etc.
- ☐ Mulch, soil, compost, organic matter
- ☐ Composting system
- ☐ Hydroponic/aquaponics system
- ☐ Seeds, starter plants
- ☐ Trellises, plant supports
- ☐ Curriculum materials
- ☐ Student log books
- ☐ Garden log book for volunteers
- ☐ Plant markers (purchased or homemade)
- ☐ Storage shed or some other structure to store tools
- ☐ Organic pest control materials
- ☐ Materials for walking paths
- ☐ Seating, if desired
- ☐ Fence if needed to keep out deer, other pests
- ☐ Easy set-up tailgate tent for shade

**SETTING POLICY:**

Decisions need to be made about the following:

- ☐ Who can use the garden (Can community members enter at any time?)
- ☐ When is the garden accessible?
- ☐ Can anyone harvest the garden?
- ☐ Will it be fenced to keep people out, or is it open to all?
- ☐ How will you address vandalism?





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### SAFETY SIGNS, GUIDELINES (RULES) AND OTHER INFORMATIONAL SIGNS:

- ☐ Friendly, welcoming signs in place that feature your garden name and that make visitors feel as if they are a part of the garden
- ☐ Positive guidelines (rules) for youth, created by youth in partnership with stakeholders in the garden. (For instance, rather than *do not run*, state *walking allowed on people paths*.)
- ☐ Colorful signage to identify plants, garden terms or methods, grade level gardens, etc.
- ☐ Information about when the community can harvest, if allowed.

### SAFETY MEASURES:

- ☐ Children wear garden safe clothing including close-toed shoes, sun-safe hats, etc.
- ☐ Parental permission received for use of insect spray or sunscreen
- ☐ Shade structure available for hot, sunny days
- ☐ Water cooler available.
- ☐ Education about proper use of tools taught to avoid injury.
- ☐ Emergency procedures in place including those for children with allergies
- ☐ Hazardous chemicals, if any, identified and stored properly
- ☐ Pesticides; fertilizers used only by authorized personnel if allowed by governing agencies and only when needed
- ☐ Integrated Pest Management procedures used and promoted
- ☐ Children understand rules and have clearly assigned duties
- ☐ Adequate adult to youth ratio in the garden
- ☐ All adults working with youth have completed appropriate application procedures and have been approved
- ☐ Youth are properly supervised while in the garden
- ☐ All permission and health forms on file and readily available
- ☐ Garden to cafeteria safety measures in place
- ☐ Consult with site attorney and insurance agent if needed



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## DESIGNING AND CONSTRUCTING:

- ☐ Design and draw up plans and map with all stakeholders including students
- ☐ Determine site selection taking into consideration the slope of land, water drainage, hours of sunlight, wind breaks, etc., and then soil test (contact University Extension for assistance)
- ☐ Use *call before you dig* services before putting shovel into ground
- ☐ Make sure that the garden has easy access for students and teachers, yet is visible to the community for reduced vandalism but increased community participation and buy-in
- ☐ Removed from sports fields if it might cause a problem, although gardens near sports fields are sometimes a good way to engage volunteers in the summer
- ☐ Other protections such as fencing in place to protect children from wandering into roadways, or large pests from entering the garden
- ☐ The garden is easy to manage for the stage that you are in, but room for future development has been planned for and land set aside for additional structures
- ☐ Funds and materials are available to start building the garden based on current design
- ☐ Garden measured and space laid out; volunteers engaged in building the garden
- ☐ Construct garden materials such as raised beds, etc.
- ☐ Install other structures/infrastructure
- ☐ Prepare easy pathways and areas for people to gather in for educational and entertainment purposes
- ☐ Insure easy access to a water source
- ☐ Plant the garden

## CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS:

- ☐ If the advisory committee has not already done so, determine curriculum and how the garden will be used as a context for learning
- ☐ Align lessons to state or national standards if desired
- ☐ Decide if one grade or grade band will use the garden every year, or if all grades will use it
- ☐ Determine if each classroom will have their own plot or patch, or if everyone will use the same garden
- ☐ Decide how to manage students while in the garden (students should develop rules/guidelines with other stakeholders)
- ☐ Develop a list of jobs for students to do while in the garden so that they are fully engaged
- ☐ Survey teachers to see what types of things they need or want to do in the garden in order to teach their subject (for mathematics, for instance, when the garden is planted students can measure rows, seed depth, width, etc.)
- ☐ Shared storage system so that all lesson plans can be compiled and kept in one place
- ☐ Garden log book for teachers to record what was done in the garden during their class period
- ☐ Logbooks for students
- ☐ Develop extra-curricular activities in the garden that children present such as an *art or music in the garden night*, or other classes such as *Saturday morning yoga* or *cooking from the garden classes for health and wellness* taught by nutrition experts, that community members are invited to attend
- ☐ Identify resource personnel such as University Extension for additional programming





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## LONG TERM SUSTAINABILITY:

- ☐ Have stakeholders evaluate and adapt every year
- ☐ Connect with teachers and revise curriculum/garden to meet needs
- ☐ Measure student growth and knowledge gained as a result of using the garden as a context for learning
- ☐ Maintain solid working relationships with all stakeholders, and show gratitude frequently and at an annual capstone/harvest event
- ☐ Have a continuous marketing plan that you update from time to time
- ☐ Send personnel to educational events related to gardening such as those offered by University Extension for continued mastery and innovation



\*Adapted from:

<https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/publication/attachments/Checklist%20for%20Starting%20a%20School%20Garden%5B1%5D.pdf>.

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