

Gathering Support for Your School Garden

There are numerous steps to take to gather the support you'll need for a successful school garden experience.

☐ Enlist Administrators' Buy-In

It is important to have the support of your principal or director before you begin so this person will be accommodating when it comes to using time, space, funding, and other school resources. It's great to show how your garden efforts will support meeting learning standards and objectives of your school's curriculum.

☐ Form a Teaching Team

While it is important to have a teacher serve as a garden coordinator, a garden team is a must! It is recommended to gather a team of 3-5 teachers who will be involved. Preferably, the teachers who teach various subjects at various grade levels can engage students in agriculture through multiple lenses. A larger team allows for flexibility in overcoming challenges of teacher turnover, changes in assignments, health issues, etc. It also allows for dividing out responsibilities, including planting, watering, and harvesting. One of the most common reasons that school gardens struggle is not having a dynamic and engaged teacher team.

☐ Set a Budget and Seek Funding and Donations

First make a list of the materials you will need and estimate the costs. Pages 4-7 of the GTS guide outline the supplies for implementing the three GTS growing methods. After you make a list, check what is available at your school already. Identify what you might get donated and estimate the cost of materials you will need to purchase. Get approval for seeking grants and donations. Keep in mind that purchasing quality, reusable materials will be more sustainable and save money in the long run.



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There are many potential sources of funding and materials for your school garden.

- **Overall support** - Find out what materials could be covered by the school budget under STEM, extended learning, etc. It doesn't hurt to ask!
- **Program Support** - USDA Farm to School grants, foundations, etc. These grants will fund staff time for program and curriculum development and garden materials. Search online for "Farm to School grants" and "school garden grants".
- **Local Funding** – PTO organizations, school fundraisers, and crowdfunding are great ways to get support. When approaching potential supporters, be sure to include artwork and written messages from kids!
- **Materials** - Major home and garden retailers and other businesses may consider donating tools, soil, seeds, and/or plants. Request materials free or at cost.

Determine Growing Locations

For outdoor raised beds, choose locations that incorporate as many major components as possible. Ideally the garden bed will be in a south-facing spot with full sun. Try to stay three times as far away from trees and buildings as they are tall. Avoid placing a garden bed along a wall or a fence, because students should be able to reach the garden from all sides. Know where your sources of fresh, potable water are and make sure you are easily able to get fresh water to your garden. For more details, see the modules about Outdoor Raised Beds, and the Indoor and Outdoor Watering modules.

For indoor growing stations, you'll need a sturdy, easily cleanable surface and access to electricity. Display the growing systems where students and administrators will view them easily every day. Set the hydroponic unit at a height that makes it easy for your students to make daily observations and to add water and fertilizer.

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☐ Build Your Knowledge

Benefits of school gardens

- Gather research data to support your efforts: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/f2s/growing-your-farm-school-program>

Growing techniques

- Follow recommendations about starting a school garden: <https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2013/08/13/start-school-garden-heres-how>

☐ Consider Other Supports

- **Custodial and Groundskeeping staff** – Custodians can help determine the best placement and spacing of garden beds so that the surrounding areas can be maintained.
 - **Food service staff** – Include food service in the garden planning and progress. Consider placing growing units in the cafeteria for visibility and engagement.
 - **Communications** – Share your garden stories on social media and in school newsletters. Invite school district communications teams, local media, and funders to take part in garden activities, especially harvesting and taste testing.
 - **Parent Teacher Organizations** – Engage parent groups in material drives and fundraisers for the garden.
 - **University Extension** – Extension professionals who specialize in agriculture and nutrition and SNAP-Ed or EFNEP educators can offer support in many ways. Find out if your county Extension office has Master Gardeners who can assist, as well.
 - **Garden Signage** – Raise awareness and create excitement by creating colorful plant labels and messages about garden learning for garden signs. Be sure to acknowledge funders, donors, coordinators and volunteers.
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