

School Gardens

Add Gardens to Your School Curriculum



Gardening projects for children in a school setting provide an extraordinary learning opportunity, and their popularity is increasing. Through school gardening children can learn science, mathematics, English, environmental studies, health, family and consumer sciences and art. They learn first-hand about plants, nature and the outdoors, and they learn how fresh food is grown. Curriculum materials are available to assist teachers in integrating school gardens into the formal educational experience. Teachers in Louisiana have an excellent opportunity to enrich the educational experience and the lives of children through the use of school gardens.

Benefits of School Gardens

- Gardens provide sensory stimulation of smells, textures, colors and sounds.
- Gardening is a healthy outdoor activity for all youth.
- Kids are more likely to eat fruits and vegetables they grow and improve their attitude toward fruits and vegetables.
- LSU AgCenter 4-H and Junior Master Gardener programs can collaborate the school gardens.
- Children can improve their self-esteem and attitude toward school through gardening projects.
- Children can learn environmental stewardship and scientific principles.
- Community gardens foster group cohesion and improve interpersonal relationships.
- Gardening projects help foster family relationships and increase parental involvement.



Photo by Denyse Cummins, LSU AgCenter Agent

How to Start a School Garden

- Form a planning committee or garden team. Establish a purpose and vision, and set educational goals.
- Choose a site and design; prepare and develop the site. Get students involved early to enhance a feeling of ownership. Research material costs and specifications with local experts.
- Involve parents and community partners in such activities as sod removal, soil preparation, construction and carpentry.
- Involve students whenever possible, especially with plantings.
- Develop a layout of the students' gardening activities. Determine which groups of students will be doing what and when. Determine how bed space will be allocated. Assign relevant tasks to volunteers.
- Have a regular schedule for maintenance, and clearly post the tasks to be done. Be creative in addressing maintenance needs such as making weeding fun. Keep maintenance at set times so volunteers know when they can assist, and make sure the right tools and resources are available.
- Review garden use and activities. What worked well and what needs to be modified? Survey the teachers and students about what they liked and didn't like, and discuss the results with the garden team.

Things to Consider When Planning a School Garden

- Is your principal supportive? Teachers? Custodial Staff? Parents?
- Who is the garden going to serve? How many students? Classes? Grade levels?
- Start small! To ensure a successful garden, start small and then expand over time.
- Define the purpose: Is this an ornamental flower garden, herb garden, vegetable garden or combination?
- Do you have a 4-H program in your school? Is there a Master Gardener Program in your community?
- Find an area that gets ample sunlight, 6-8 hours, per day.
- Assess soil condition and drainage. Raised beds are essential for drainage and compost may need to be added to soil. Consult your nearest parish LSU AgCenter Extension office.
- Is water nearby and available? Will you need a hose or watering cans? What other tools are needed? Who will maintain the garden during holidays?
- Maintaining a school garden in the summer may be too exhausting with heat, weeds and organizing volunteers. Consider a fall and spring garden.
- What resources are available locally to support the school garden?
- Are volunteers available and how will they be used? Are there Louisiana Master Gardeners willing to assist with the garden?

Types of Gardens

Kitchen Garden – vegetables and herbs used in cooking – squash, tomato, beans, broccoli, cucumber, parsley.

Pizza Garden – items used in pizza – tomatoes, bell pepper, onions, garlic, chives, oregano.

Herb / Sensory Garden – basil, mint, thyme, oregano, rosemary, lemon grass.

Butterfly Garden – plants that attract butterflies – purple coneflower, bee balm, butterfly bush, butterfly weed, zinnias.

Craft Garden – plants that provide materials for art projects – gourds, sunflowers, pansies, dry beans, corn.

Salsa Garden – ingredients used in salsa – chile pepper, tomato, onion, cilantro, tomatillo.

Rainbow Garden – the colors of the rainbow – zinnias, sunflowers, purple coneflower, marigolds, pansies.

Literacy Garden – plants found in children's literature – blackberries, lettuce, beans, radish, parsley, cabbages, potatoes, onions.

Native American – plant a Three Sisters garden – corn, beans, squash.

International Garden – plants native to other countries around the world – okra, watermelon, collards, pac choi, peppers, potatoes.

Alphabet Garden – create an ABC garden with plants that represent the alphabet – alyssum, basil, corn, dill, eggplant, fennel, geranium.

Resources Available

- Louisiana Master Gardener volunteers work with the LSU AgCenter extension office in each parish. www.lsuagcenter.com/mastergardener
- The 4-H program in Louisiana can help support the school garden concept. www.louisiana4h.org
- The Junior Master Gardener Program is a school gardening program. www.jmgkids.us
- The Edible Schoolyard is an example of a successful program that has lessons available. www.edibleschoolyard.org
- National Gardening Association. www.kidsgardening.com
- American Community Gardening Association. www.communitygarden.org
- School gardening lessons and programs. www.journeytoforever.org/edu_garden_link.html
- Chicago Botanic Garden – School Gardens. www.chicagobotanic.org/schoolgarden

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For more information contact your nearest parish

Extension Office, 4-H Club,

Louisiana Master Gardener program

LSU AgCenter

Visit our Web site: www.lsuagcenter.com

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