

Flippin Community School Garden



The School Garden as an introduction to health

- ❖ A school garden can give children an introduction to fresh vegetables in an learning environment which can support families attempting to eat healthier.
- ❖ The activity of gardening and exposure to beneficial sunlight are also key in developing healthy lifestyle in an increasingly sedentary society.(There is a garden tool for every muscle group!)
- ❖ Learning about growing food in a social setting of peers also creates support and encouragement to continue the activity.
- ❖ Gardening activity through the production of endorphins has been shown to lower stress .

Benefits of the school garden

- ❖ Aside from a basic introduction to growing fresh vegetables, participating in a school garden does many things:
 - The school garden increases retention of lessons taught through garden based education and raises test scores.
 - The activity during school helps to release pent up energy and refocus children for learning in a normal classroom setting.
 - Familiarity of fresh food from a garden and taste testing in the classroom reduces waste in the cafeteria over a period of time. (Timely for cafeterias struggling to implement nutritional standards when children are not willing to try them)
 - Children take home fresh ideas to tell mom and dad and increase consumption of fresh foods at home.

Starting the School Garden

- ❖ Creating a garden committee to help manage the garden is a great place to start. The committee should be composed of community members of diverse experience and background. There is no “right” way to start your garden . Every school garden is as unique as the community it is in.
- ❖ A garden can be urban or rural. An empty lot near school, a raised bed by the school building, a tabletop garden, or an empty corner of the playground all work well. Surprisingly little space is required when vertical gardening is employed.
- ❖ No matter the experience level, a garden needs enthusiasm to thrive coupled with a willingness to learn .

- ❖ A school garden is a great place to start. It is a place where mistakes are made and lessons are learned for next season.



A school garden can be started in any socioeconomic setting

- ❖ Many government and private foundation grants are available to start school gardens.
- ❖ Even low income families can easily grow a garden with the use of SNAP funds to purchase seeds or plants.
- ❖ With community volunteers and donations , a garden can be started with very little actual funds. Example: wood chips from tree trimmers, seeds donated from retail stores at the end of the season, compost material from the school cafeteria or local restaurants(see regulations in your state), or even a nursery donating plants in exchange for a sign space that makes other gardeners aware of their local business.
- ❖ The local Extension Agent is a great resource for information on many topics as well as the Master Gardeners, who are often looking for community projects to participate in.

Involving the community in the garden

- ❖ Creating a dual usage garden space invites students to include their families in growing and eating fresh foods, and encourages the community gardeners to help support and develop a sustainable garden.
- ❖ If a farmers market exists in the community, the students could fundraise from their own plot for school projects or perhaps the garden itself.
- ❖ Asking local businesses and organizations to support the garden through donations or volunteering creates a sustainable community.



Curriculum

- ❖ Any subject matter in any grade level can become garden based education.
 - Mathematics can start with measuring the area of space needed(square foot gardening), and run up to exponential graphing of number of plants produced based on seed saving and planting
 - Literature can start with The Little Red Hen and move up to a period garden based on the Civil War or the Great Depression and creating dishes that would have come from such gardens.
 - Science can be parts of a plant, learning how to use the scientific method in a science fair or looking into the cellular structure of plants.

- ❖ Pre-made curriculums can also be found. Two that I have used are Grow It, Try It , Like It, for preschool and The Garden Detectives for 3rd and 4th grade.

Farm to School

- ❖ Farm to School is an idea that bridges the gap between curriculum and the cafeteria.
- ❖ A field trip to the school garden or a local farm is a fun environment to learn about real world application and for children to learn where their food grows.
- ❖ Following such a field trip or included in it, a tasting allows kids to experiment with new fresh foods that they may not have tasted before.
- ❖ Special promotions in the cafeteria when serving local foods(especially from the school garden)such as posters, special salad bars or even different colored serving spoons raise awareness and acceptance of a new food.
- ❖ For lasting effect on health, there must be an integration into the local