

## School Garden Startup Steps

Starting a school garden is no small task. A committed team from the school and beyond is needed to ensure success. Please answer, or attempt to answer, the questions below with all relevant stakeholders as a group.

This document is designed for your team to create a school garden on your own by problem solving through some commonly asked questions and ideas! You can find more resources at [growmorewasteless.com](http://growmorewasteless.com). If you work through this document and still would like consultative support from Cat Buxton, please reach out at [cat@growmorewasteless.com](mailto:cat@growmorewasteless.com)

### School Information

Name of School/Town

Primary contact information for this project

Describe the school (grades taught, student count, staff count, teacher to student ratios, mission of the school, private or public, in a city or rural area, etc.)

Describe the location of the school (close to roadways, on a hillside, open field, wooded lot, paved lot, etc.). Developing a working map of the school property with information on utilities, current land use, soils, and more may be helpful at this stage.

Describe the local community in relation to the school (are there lots of community volunteers, active parents, activities at the school are well-attended, donations from local businesses common?)

### Vision

Who wants the school garden and why?

Who: Administrators, teachers, students, cafeteria staff or food service, facilities and maintenance staff, parents, nurses, librarians, farmers, community volunteers, school board, etc?

Why:

- Curriculum: science, math, biology, waste reduction, watershed education, history, climate change, place-based education, spontaneous learning, etc.
- Beautification of the school grounds
- Physical education, getting students outside
- Improving nutritional status of the food served in the cafeteria
- Increasing the involvement of the community in the school

*Some types of Gardens to consider*

- Science Lab
- Food production, "snack" destination, source for food service
- History gardens (Shakespeare, colonial, Three Sisters, food culture...)
- Herb Garden (tea, medicine, craft, culinary...)
- Shade plants
- Native grasses and plants
- Butterfly or pollinator gardens
- Ecosystem
- Heirloom
- Nutrition and Health (Vitamin A, balanced meal, protein...)
- Math gardens (raised beds, prediction, fractions...)
- Plant families
- Meal gardens (pizza, salad, salsa...)
- Sensory (color, touch, sound, scent...)

Why not: What are fears/reservations about a school garden (bugs, weeds, work, etc.)?

Why now: Why are you interested in getting serious about the school garden project now? Have resources become available, need recognized, staff changeovers, etc.?

## Garden Components

Based on your answers from above, what does your ideal garden encompass:

- Harvest seasons (spring, fall, summer, all?) - keep in mind your last frost date and first frost date
- Garden beds/rows (raised or in-ground), containers, vertical gardens, rooftop gardens, etc.
- Clear wide pathways for accessibility of all students and volunteers
- Perennial fruit bushes and trees, short or long term
- Annual plants / Perennial plants
- Flowers, vegetables, fruits, nuts, herbs, etc.
- Compost system
- Teaching area with seating and tables, out of direct sunlight (overhead barrier or tree enclosure)
- Tool shed or storage area
- Cold frames or greenhouse
- Irrigation / hoses
- Fencing
- Signage

How much space does each of the desired garden components from above require to meet the needs of the associated stakeholders (cafeteria food volume, outdoor classroom area, bed size for active participation for student population, volume of production for math or science needs, greenhouse size, etc.)?

*Some advice:* Start small. Make it beautiful. Have a vision for how it will expand.

## Resources

Does your school have the resources necessary to start a new school garden as envisioned. Do you have the person-power, available space, and financial and other resources needed for this project?

## People

Who will be responsible for managing the creation of the school gardens for the next 2-5 years?

- Team of 2-5 people fully invested in seeing this project through to fruition and continuing care once established.
- This does not need to include everyone who wants the school garden, but this team should be aware of, and include, those stakeholders' interests at every stage.

## Space

Do you have a location on the school property where the garden you envision will be able to be installed and maintained? Some things to consider when analyzing your school property for a garden location:

- Choose a spot with high visibility for the public
- Choose a spot close to the school
- Ensure easy access for teachers, students, and volunteers
- Choose a spot with adequate sun exposure for the plants you want to grow
- Choose a spot with an outdoor spigot nearby - water source must be very convenient
- Choose a spot where the soil type (clay, sandy, rocky, loamy, etc.) is appropriate for the desired plants and purposes (consider raised beds or containers if soils need to be adjusted)
- Avoid damp spots and steep spots
- Avoid areas where there may be problems such as wells, septic systems, and in-ground tanks
- Avoid areas where people and/or pests may threaten the garden
- Avoid areas where roof runoff may negatively impact the garden
- Avoid areas that are already being used constructively for school activities and cannot be relocated
- Avoid areas with contaminated or deficient soils (soil tests may be necessary)

Based on your analysis considering the guidance above, is there a location with enough space where your ideal garden, with all of its components, can be installed and maintained? If not, it may be necessary to reconsider the scope of the garden with all stakeholders present. You may need to prioritize which uses and scales are going to be feasible with your available space.

Throughout this process it may be helpful to work with a map for the area envisioned and then work out plans for individual garden beds.

### Funding

Based on your goals for the garden, it is important to create a budget for the garden as envisioned.

Some things you will possibly need funding or donations for:

- site preparation - making water reach the garden, clearing land, tilling the first year
- soil tests
- clean soil and garden compost
- soil amendments, fertilizers, pesticides (decide what materials you are willing to use in the gardens knowing that the students will be in contact with these products)
- wood and hardware
- garden tools - *adult and student? Depending on how many children will be working at a time, you'll need multiple rakes, shovels, trowels, clippers, scissors, hose, forks for turning soil and compost, a mallet for pounding in stakes, wire clipper, measuring tape, thermometers for air and compost*
- initial labor
- seeds and plants
- seed starting supplies: soil, pots, watering cans, mister, grow lights
- irrigation needs (hoses, drip, connections)
- garden mulch, materials for walkways
- stakes, trellis, twine
- greenhouse/cold frames
- tables, chairs, overhead structures
- outside consultants
- payment for coordination with community partners
- trainings for teachers, administrators, volunteers, etc.
- instructional materials (lenses, books, field guides, seeds and starting materials, scales, measuring devices)
- other design elements? pots, fencing, season extension, containers, compost area...

Once you've completed your expected expenses budget, consider your available resources.

- Do you have startup funding available? If so, how much?
- Do you have ongoing funding available? If so, how much?
- What types of resources, besides funding, do you have available at the school (currently or in the future)?
- Are there supporting businesses/organizations to partner with in your area? (ie: hardware stores, farms, nursery or garden center, master gardeners, garden clubs, quarry)
- Are there grants or other programs that could supplement funding?

Based on these limitations, it may again be necessary to refine the scope of the garden. This is an iterative process

## Moving Forward

Once you've refined your vision for the garden based on available resources and feel confident in your ability to implement this garden, it's time to document a plan. Build upon it as you go. Be very clear with instructions and inclusive in the evolutionary development of the plan.

Plan should include:

- Timeline for project implementation
- Task assignments and responsibilities
- Contact information
- Communication protocols
  - Within team
  - To larger community
  - PR plan - *Consider who will take photographs and write press releases or letters to the editor. Be sure to follow school policy about parental permission to use images.*
  - Consider your system for requesting and thanking donors
- Define the rules of the garden: Have clear, posted signs in the garden as well
- Define the non-negotiable requirements of the garden (non-toxic, other values)
- Coordinating use of garden (if schedule is needed)
- Curriculum to go along with garden plans
- Annual garden maps. *Your maps will have many uses.*
- Annual planning schedule: ordering seeds, scheduling winterizing beds, harvesting, subsequent planting, etc.
- Maintenance schedule: watering, weeding, staking, fertilizing, pruning, bug picking, turning compost, mulching, cover crop planting in fall
- Volunteer and staff training needs/recruitment/requirements/schedule
- Continuity plan if Garden Team leaders leave
- Garden journal or log. *Have a means of collecting, storing and sharing good garden lessons, yields, pest problems and growing experiences.*
- Budget. Record funds and in-kind donations and expenses
- Keep records of the garden design process from above as well. Helps to remember why the garden was installed as designed.