

Tried and True Advice

STARTING A GARDEN



At the end of the day, gardens succeed because people are committed, and the garden is integrated into the day as much as possible.

One of the most important questions we can help our kids answer is, “**Where does our food come from?**” Perhaps the best tool to help us explore this topic is a garden. Due to rising popularity, we have more and more knowledge about what’s working in school gardens across the country and Maine. Here are some tips to help make your school garden adventure a success.

Form a team

- Don’t do this alone; get a team together that might include teachers, staff, parents, students, etc.
- Designate someone as the garden coordinator to keep things moving forward. This position can rotate among team members.

Plan your garden

- Dream! Explore your schoolyard—think about parking lots, roof tops, lawns, and classrooms. Remember, you can grow food anywhere!
- Make friends with your facilities director and crew! They’re the ones who can tell you the best locations, ensure water access, and help order supplies.
- Draw pictures; come up with a master plan. If you are planning a major garden, you may want to get a professional landscape architect or permaculture designer to help you with this process. Your local Cooperative Extension office can help with free workshops and materials.
- Build a budget. Consider contacting local businesses to ask how they might support your garden—they may be excited to provide supplies or cash. Or search the web for grant opportunities (e.g., www.kidsgardening.org).
- If your budget is small, start small, maybe with just a few container gardens. Never lose sight of the big picture, but you have to start somewhere!
- Things you will absolutely want to have are:
 - Good soil (get it tested if you are going to grow in the ground).
 - At least six hours of sunlight.
 - A water source.
 - A tool shed.
- Plan for summer maintenance! Schedule team members and/or recruit others like parents, teachers, and student volunteers for different maintenance tasks, or integrate garden maintenance into summer school programs. Make friends with a farmer to consult with as problems arise.



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Enjoy your garden!

- Use your harvested food. Use it for snacks in the classroom, food in the cafeteria, send it home with children, or donate to pantries.
- Incorporate activities that are integrated into the day (e.g., let kids pull weeds during outdoor time.)
- Above all else, have fun!