



## **CHAPTER I: Starting a School Garden**

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1. Form a Garden Committee
2. Choose a Location
3. Set Goals and Vision
4. Develop a Budget
5. Seek Permission- Research Codes and Policies
6. Design the Garden
7. Plan a Year Round Calendar
8. Develop an Exit Strategy
9. Enlist the Community
10. Set a date for Groundbreaking

### **STEP 1: FORM A GARDEN COMMITTEE**

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The committee will tackle the planning, fundraising, publicizing, building, and planting of the school garden. An effective committee is able to communicate the vision of the garden, support each other and share responsibilities. It includes diverse members and strives to incorporate the individual and group goals of the garden.

The first step in starting a school garden is to enlist a diverse group of parents, teachers, community members and student leaders to support the school garden. Other key people to enlist support in the early stages of the garden plan may include the maintenance, health and administrative staff, as well as local and regional professionals. Experience in gardening, fundraising, public relations, and curriculum integration are also great skills to look for when recruiting team members. It may be helpful to delegate responsibilities or give titles to members (for example, publicity, donations, work day planning, etc). Frequent communication with potential team members is very important: the more members are invited to be part of the planning, the more invested they will be in the success and maintenance of the garden.

### **STEP 2: CHOSE A LOCATION**

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Not enough can be said about finding the right location for a school garden. Water, sun-exposure, accessibility, safety, and permanence should be addressed and weighed when choosing the perfect location for your school garden.

**Water:** Ensure that your water source will be easily accessible. Water spigots and new plumbing can be added, but often carry an expensive price tag. In addition to identifying the source determine whether you will use an automatic drip system or start with hand watering. Dragging and moving hoses every day is not a sustainable water practice. Think easy: plan ahead.

**Sunlight:** Sun exposure will help determine which plants will grow well in your garden area. A minimum of 6 hours is necessary for most vegetables and flowers. Check potential sites throughout the day and throughout the seasons. What may seem like the perfect location in mid December will inevitably change come April. Check for trees, roofing, and other structures that may inhibit sunlight.

**Access:** Accessibility to the students and staff will often determine the amount of time the school participates in the garden. However a location that receives heavy foot traffic may increase usage but may also increase trampling of area plants.

**Permanence:** Choose a site that will be there for the life of the school. Keeping in mind that as our communities grow so do our schools and the size of the school building. Choose a location that can be permanent and that will not have to be removed due to the school expansion. Talk to your school principal about the long-term plans for the school, so the site can remain a permanent fixture.

**Security:** Choose a site that is safe for the school community and the neighboring community. Determine what wildlife may use the garden and whether a fence will be necessary. If possible, choose a site away from fast traffic, highways, etc.

### **STEP 3: SET GOALS AND VISION OF SCHOOL GARDEN**

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Defining clear and attainable goals is key to the planning and implementation process. Clarifying long term and short term goals will help the team prioritize tasks and keep the project from feeling daunting. Well-defined goals help the committee communicate the garden's mission to students, administration, the community and possible funders.

The vision and goal for the garden will depend on each individual school's resources and areas of interest. Some schools may choose to focus on food production while others might focus on wildlife restoration, curriculum integration, or physical activity.

A vision for the garden is different from its goals. The vision will guide the group for the longevity of the project, while goals may come and go as they are achieved. With each goal set for the garden, consider the steps it will take to achieve those goals. Examples of goals may include: creating a space for reading and writing exercises, enhancing science or history curriculum, or having enough food for one day at the school salad bar. A sample vision could be "to create an environment that enhances educational opportunities, stewardship, and community building."

### **STEP 4: DEVELOP A BUDGET**

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Consider a flexible budget for the school garden, one that can change as funds and resources become available. Start by budgeting for small projects that will quickly produce visible results. Prioritize your expenses. Which items are essential to the start up of the garden? Keep in mind; the first year of a garden is usually the most expensive year due to installation costs.

**Possible Income:** Creative financing is a hallmark for many successful garden projects. Financing varies from penny collecting and bake-sale hosting to grant writing. How the

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garden is funded able to may depend in part on whether this is the first garden at the school or following a gardening tradition.

Resources for income should come from both the school as well as outside funders. Income should be divided between resources within the school and outside resources. School resources may include PTO, parents, a school fundraiser or adding a line item to the school's extra curricular budget. Outside resources can include individual businesses or national and local grants. For a current list of fundraising ideas and available national resources visit: [www.kidsgardening.org](http://www.kidsgardening.org)

Make a wish list of garden materials to advertise in the school newsletter, on public bulletin boards, and in the newspaper. In-kind donations are a great resource, but should not be relied on entirely. Although many tools, plants, seeds and materials can be donated in-kind, make allotments in the budget for these items. If the materials are donated, then the money allotted is available for other projects and advancements. Relying heavily on in-kind donations can often delay the design or restrict the garden design.

Below is a list of tools, supplies, and materials for a typical school garden.

<b>Possible Expenses:</b>
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Soil Amendments</li><li>• Plants</li><li>• Seeds</li><li>• Garden Tools (rakes, hoes, shovels, spades, trowels)</li><li>• Art supplies</li><li>• Classroom Projects cost</li><li>• Garden Signs and Labels</li><li>• Watering Supplies (sprinklers, drip system, timers, hoses, watering cans, etc.)</li><li>• Thermometers and Rain Gauges</li><li>• Gloves (various sizes)</li><li>• Hammer or Mallets (for pounding stakes)</li><li>• Wheelbarrow or Garden Cart</li><li>• Construction Materials (for tool sheds, raised beds, birdhouses, etc)</li><li>• Other: scissors, twine, stakes,</li></ul> |
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**Tips on Kids' Tools:**

- Consider having enough tools on hand for an entire classroom.
- Get the best quality tools the budget allows. Kids' gardening tools are great for younger students, but often don't sustain the wear and tear of multiple uses. Consider offering a mix of small, sturdy, and adult sized tools for the garden.
- Encourage safety by teaching children the appropriate handling of tools and having a safe space to store tools when not in use.

## **STEP 5: SEEK PERMISSION AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

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Before breaking ground on your school garden, carefully research your school, county, and city codes and policies. Seek permission from the school district, school, and neighborhood before beginning. Ask your school administration about liability concerns and insurance. Liability insurance is often covered under the school's insurance, but questions should be asked about visiting community volunteers and use of the garden during off school hours.

Give administration, teachers, and parents a preview of possible expectations and responsibilities. The key to any successful garden project is determined by the time and commitment of those involved. Address the time necessary to maintain the proposed site, and get commitment for this early on.

## **STEP 6: CREATING YOUR GARDEN DESIGN**

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Designing a garden with learning in mind

Garden design should be a fun and engaging process. The more involvement students and the community have in the design, the more invested they will be in the outcome and success of the project. Kids of all ages can assist with the design process. There are many ways each class can be part of this decision. Designs can be selected by classroom votes; individual classes can be responsible for different sections of the garden; students may submit drawings and ideas on their own, or break into small groups to plan.

Educational opportunities will arise any size, shape or theme garden, but designing a garden with education in mind from the start will increase the opportunities for school and teacher usage.

- **Size:** Gardens can be grown on rooftops, inside courtyards, in containers, raised beds, and in the existing ground. When determining the size of the garden, consider the potential maintenance, the size of the budget, and determined use of the garden. It is easier to allot space for the total garden and create the garden in stages as opposed to all at once. Visuals, timelines, and maps will help communicate the long and short-term design plans of the garden.
- **Soil:** A soil test is highly recommended as it will determine if amendments are needed for the garden plot, or if it may be preferable to build raised beds and container gardens. Testing the soil is best done in the fall, if amendments need to be made for an in-ground garden. A soil test will determine the suitability of certain plants and the viability of your land.

### **Plant Selection:**

What plants best suit the goals of the garden?

- Annuals (planted every year)?
- Perennials (come back each year on their own)?
- Natives (provide low water consumption and education about the surrounding environment)?

- Food crops (nutrition education and source for snacks and lunch programming)?
- Habitat plants (teaches ecology and provides food for birds, bugs, butterflies and other creatures to study)?

What kind of watering system/budget is available for the garden?

- Do plants need to be drought tolerant?
- Will tall plants block an overhead watering system?
- Do plantings need to be varied so that water use is moderate?

**Maximizing Space:** Using bio-intensive gardening principles will help increase production and usage of a small or large sized garden space. Container gardening can be used on or near walkways to increase growing space. Raised beds can be more easily accessed while also minimizing foot traffic and maintenance.

**Choosing a Theme:** A garden theme can provide a strong focus and voice for your school garden. Several garden themes are listed in this guide, many of them created by kids. Consider having students decide on an individual class theme that represents their class's curriculum and/or character. The overall design of the garden can include many themes, and the plants related to each theme may be better suited in one part of the garden landscape than another.

Here are just a few to consider.

**Bird and Butterfly Garden:** A bird and butterfly garden includes native species that attract area birds and butterflies. It is important to include plants for the mature butterflies and plants that can host their larvae or students might choose to plant something to attract a specific bird or butterfly. A hummingbird garden would include purple and red plants and petals that form trumpet shapes for their skinny beaks. All bird and butterfly gardens will need some water source such as a birdbath, pond or butterfly terrarium.

**Sensory Garden:** Sensory gardens include plants that engage touch, smell, sound, taste or sight. Sensory gardens can appeal to one or all the five senses. The Garden Project has a list of plants based on each of the five senses. Some examples are the very soft and popular lamb's ear, or chocolate mint for a unique and powerful smell.

**Pizza Garden:** Pizza gardens are circular gardens, with slices for different pizza ingredients. Each slice of a pizza can be composed of plants that resemble toppings or include herbs and veggies that would be found on a pizza such as: thyme, oregano, basil, peppers, or spinach.

**3 Sisters Garden:** A Three Sisters garden includes corn, beans and squash, (interchanged with pumpkins or gourds too).

These plants use each other to promote growth. Pole beans can grow on the corn to save space, and corn provides shade for the squash. You can use all heirloom seeds for this project and create a water- wise and culturally rich garden.

**Tea or Lemonade Garden:** Peppermint,

The 3 Sisters Garden integrates well into Durango 9R's third grade curriculum which studies the cultural traditions of the Anasazi, who, along with other Native American cultures often used three sisters gardens in their farming practices.

chamomile, lavender, lemon balm, and chocolate mint are all suitable plants for the Southwest and all can be harvested for great hot or cold teas. Start the next year with a taste test or class lemonade stand.

**Herb Garden:** There are hundreds of herbs that are suitable for Southwest Colorado's growing conditions. Focus can be on the most colorful and aromatic herbs, or herbs used for culinary or medicinal purposes.

**Salad Bar Garden:** Growing food items for the school salad bar is a great way to connect the garden to the school lunch program. Talk to the kitchen manager or food service's director about which foods might be most useful. Greens, tomatoes, cucumbers, and squash can all be added easily to a salad bar. This is a great way to get kids excited about eating salad and to boost participation in a school salad bar, while also teaching about nutrition and healthy nutrient dense food choices. Gourds and pumpkins are also very easy to grow in the southwest and both can have other fun uses such as making maracas, sponges or bowls.

**Rainbow or Color Gardens:** Consider planting garden plots of a variety of plants expressing one color. Or: what about a school garden using only the schools' colors? Or, plant different colored plants in the shape of a rainbow.

## **STEP 7: DEVELOP A YEAR ROUND GARDEN PLAN**

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A seasonal garden calendar can identify tasks, maintenance, garden programs, themes, and potential programs and guest speakers. Plans can be divided per season, year or month. Special consideration will be given to the summer usage of the school's students and community. Below is a sample calendar of year round vegetable garden plan.

### August through October

- Form Committee
- Choose Location
- Enlist Support and Seek Permission
- Sheet Compost Proposed Site
- Lay Ground Work or Fencing

### November through February

- Order Seed Catalogs
- Choose a Garden Theme or Design
- Develop Fundraising and Grant Research

### March

- Gather Supplies
- Plant Seeds for Indoor Starts
- Choose and Plan for Groundbreaking Day
- Install Water System

### April

- Groundbreaking
- Build raised beds or work in soil
- Late April/Early May: plant cool weather transplants or seeds (greens, root crops)

### May

- Early May: Plant hardy perennials

Late May/ Early June: plant warm weather plants (tomatoes, squash, corn, beans)

June through July (School out of session)

Community Work Days

Maintenance: Watering, Weeding, Harvesting

August- October

Plant Perennials

Harvest Crop

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**STEP 8: DEVELOP AN EXIT STRATEGY**

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Planning an exit strategy before groundbreaking is a strategic tool that helps measure successes while soliciting support from weary participants. Some key players in bringing the garden into existence may question what will be done if the garden garners little participation. They may ask: What happens when involved parents move, their students change schools or funds are no longer available? What will happen to the garden?

Be prepared by having an exit strategy. First, determine what situations may result in garden dissolution such as lack of student/teacher involvement, lack of resources, unsightly vegetation, or loss of responsible committee members. Having a measurement for success and a timeline to reach those measures will determine whether an exit is warranted. Prepare for an exit or a change of course for when these benchmarks are not met. For example, a suitable exit strategy for an in-ground garden may be a commitment to turn the garden back to its original form: lawn, mulch, etc. Raised bed gardens or container gardens could be donated to another school, non-profit, or family in need.

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**STEP 9: ENLIST THE COMMUNITY**

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Once a solid garden team has been formed enlisting the greater community's support is generally an easy task. This support can be gained by staying in communication with local newspapers, nurseries, and businesses about the garden, its advancements, and its general needs. Other key community support may come from local/state Division of Wildlife representatives, area farmers and producers, city and county officials, [Southwest Colorado Farm to School](#), and other resource professionals. Inviting the community to be part of the fun will go along way in soliciting resources down the road.

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**STEP 10: SET A DATE FOR GROUNDBREAKING**

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Spring is here. Crocuses have come and gone and its time to break ground. Or perhaps it is fall and time to spread out sheet composting or fencing for next springs' arrival. Regardless, a groundbreaking date and ideally a ceremony bring the school together to get the excitement rolling. Ceremonies can be short and sweet or creative, in-depth and official. A ceremony can involve poetry readings by students, ribbon cuttings, native blessings, ceremonial shoveling, and an explanation of the school garden. Treat this day as a great way to begin advertising (invite the local newspaper) and a great way to excite both school and community about the potential for growing!

