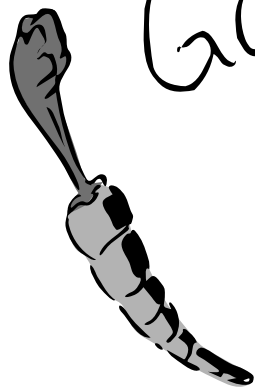


Gardening With Kids



Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service

A garden is a natural place for children to explore nature, learn where food comes from, and develop an appreciation for the environment. School gardens can be used to teach science, math, language arts, social skills and nutrition education. Gardening activities provide an opportunity for hands-on learning and can be a particularly good avenue for kinetic or tactile learners.

Benefits of youth gardening include:

- Students are excited about eating produce they grow themselves. They can expand their diets by trying new foods.
- Students learn about food safety including proper harvest, processing and storage methods.
- Gardening promotes teamwork and develops self-esteem and self-worth.
- Gardening is a lifelong skill that promotes better health.

Planning Your Garden

A successful youth gardening program starts with a good plan. Begin by creating a planning committee that includes students, teachers, parents, volunteers and facility maintenance staff. Identify who will provide leadership in terms of gardening expertise, finances, educational programs, etc. Develop a support base that will help ensure a successful program in the future.

Decide on the purpose of your garden. Is it to beautify the school grounds, attract wildlife, grow vegetables, or teach ecology? If you are establishing a school garden, consult with teaching staff and administration on curriculum goals.

Developing a Budget

Develop a budget and secure funding. Consider these items when establishing the budget:

- **Site development and improvements** including water lines; hardscape structures such as fences, raised beds,

garden sheds, benches, etc.; and initial soil preparation including weed and grass removal, grading and tilling.

- **Equipment** including big ticket items such as tillers, mowers, garden tools and water hoses.
- **Annual operating expenses** include seeds, transplants, fertilizers, garden chemicals and the water bill.
- **Curriculum and project materials** include educational and resource materials for teachers and youth and garden activity supplies. Always plan backup activities for inclement weather.
- **Miscellaneous** expenses include a first aid kit, postage, copying, refreshments, etc.

Funding

Funds for a youth gardening project may come from a variety of sources. Monetary contributions may come as a one-time gift or may be renewable.

- **School or host facility** may be able to assist with capital improvements, providing water and other expenses. Check with the host facility to see if liability insurance is in place.
- **Parent teacher organizations** may be able to help purchase tools and supplies, as well as provide labor for big projects.
- **Service organizations** often support youth projects with monetary help and volunteer labor.
- **Community foundations** exist in many areas to support local initiatives. Ask how to apply for funds.
- **Local businesses** will sometimes donate plants, seeds, supplies, equipment rental or monetary gifts for youth gardening projects. Be specific in your requests.
- **Grants** of all sizes are available from a variety of organizations and foundations. Youth gardening projects are a perfect fit for grants that promote healthy lifestyles, multigenerational programming, environmental projects or working with at-risk youth. Read applications carefully and include all requested information.



Selecting the Garden Site

After establishing a clear purpose, identify possible garden sites. Consider the following points when choosing a site:

- **Proximity to school or facility**—A garden site close to the building is best. Walking or traveling to a garden uses valuable classroom time. Is the area safe? Is the area well lit at night? Will the area need to be fenced to discourage vandalism? Is there storage space for garden tools and supplies?
- **Sunlight**—Vegetable gardens require six to eight hours of sunlight per day. Avoid areas shaded by trees or buildings.
- **Water**—Extra water is necessary during the growing season. Is there an existing water source at the site? Who will pay the water bill?
- **Soil**—A well-drained loam soil is ideal. Avoid areas where water stands after rains.
- **Size**—It is better to start small and expand as the garden program grows. Starting out too big can be overwhelming. Participants may become discouraged and lose interest. Consider the abilities and number of people involved when planning the garden.



Site Preparation

Schedule work needed to prepare the site. The work may take anywhere from a few weeks to several months. Major site preparation tasks include:

- **Soil preparation**—Remove grass and weeds. Summer is the best time to kill Bermuda grass. Add soil amendments and grading before planting. If the soil is very sandy or heavy clay, organic matter can improve the soil. Use a soil test to determine what nutrients are lacking. For more information contact your local K-State Research and Extension office.
- **Irrigation**—If water lines need to be installed, you may have to contract the work. Determine your specifications and seek bids. Select the contractor and schedule the installation.
- **Hardscape**—Install sidewalks, patios, fences, raised beds, edges, arbors, tool storage, etc. Aisles, walkways and work areas should be handicapped accessible.

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Planting and Maintenance

Students develop a sense of ownership by helping with garden planning. Discuss the purpose of the garden and recommend types of plants that meet that goal. If ideas are limited, suggest themes such as a history or ethnic garden for older students, an alphabet or rainbow garden for younger students or a pizza/salsa garden for a nutrition program.

When selecting plants for the garden, choose ones proven successful in your area and that are easy to maintain. If the garden will only be used during the school year, choose plants that will bloom or fruit while school is in session. Consider the ages and abilities of the students. Younger children lack manual dexterity, so select seeds that are large and easy to handle. Plants that germinate and grow quickly such as lettuce and radishes are good for young gardeners.

Develop a garden maintenance schedule. Decide who will be responsible for watering, weeding, harvesting, pest control, etc. Have youth help decide rules and policies for the garden.



Risk Management

Maintain a file of current health forms and emergency contact information for all youth and adults involved in the garden. Keep a first aid kit on hand. Risk management procedures and garden safety rules including the safe use of chemicals should be reviewed with students and staff before working in the garden. Only adults should handle or apply garden chemicals. Always follow label directions.



Have Fun

Document the progress of your garden in journals and pictures. Take time to celebrate successes. Plan garden parties where the young gardeners can sample the harvest. Invite parents, staff, neighbors, and program sponsors to visit the garden. Spread the good news of your garden project through newsletters and Web sites.

Most of all, have fun with gardening. Stand back and watch as the kids discover the delights of nature with every seed that sprouts, flowers and fruits. Every season brings new discoveries for young gardeners.