

Campaign for School Gardening



Starting a School Garden

If appropriately planned, the external environment can be stimulating and motivating, which allows children to become more actively involved in their outdoor surroundings. Whatever the size or style the environment takes, it can provide a valuable extra resource for teaching the National Curriculum outside of the classroom as well as therapeutic use, bringing improvements in social and mental well-being as well as physical health.



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Before considering the design

- Share the vision - Engage everyone in the school community – managers, staff, parents and pupils. Make everyone aware of the potential of a school garden and the benefits your school will gain from using it.
- Find out if any of the skills needed exist in the school community, parents, governors or the friends/PTA. Skills such as gardeners, garden designers or builders.
- Incorporate the project into the school development plan.
- Decide who will project manage the design and build of the garden and who will maintain it later?
- Establish a group to move the project forwards.
- Produce an action plan. To do this you will need to consider by when you want the garden completed.
- Identify a location for the garden, think about:
 - the distance from the classrooms
 - water supplies
 - storage of equipment
 - access to toilets
 - accessibility
 - the security of the site.
- Visit other schools that have done similar projects to gain ideas.
- Contact organisations which are experts in this field and which may be able to advise you, including those involved with school grounds maintenance at the LEA. See list at the end of document.
- Apply for funding
 - Letters to parents, garden centres, seed companies, supermarkets asking for donations of money, plants, seeds or help.
 - Ask the children to write the letters – could be done as a literacy task.
 - Don't forget - you need tools. You may require specially adapted tools.
- Find plans of the chosen site, available from the LEA. Establish the orientation (N, S, E and W) and find out whether there are any services underneath the surface of which you should be aware.



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- Legal, technical, safety guidelines and school policy documents are required.
- Survey the site – walk around it, see what you have there. Are there paths or sheds you need to keep? Are there any plants that could still be used? What trees do you have? Check to see if any of the trees are protected by preservation orders or are in a conservation area (look at the local council's website or contact the local planning office), or if the deeds of the school mention anything. All these things may affect what you can and can't do with your garden. Add any items to your plan.
- Decide on the budget.

Designing your school garden

- Get the children involved in carrying out a survey to see what they want.
- Look at your site. How big is it? What type of soil do you have (clay, sand or silt, etc)? What is the pH of the soil? How much of the garden is in light or shade and how much moisture is there? Are there any permanent features, which you have to work around?
- Establish the purpose of the garden. Is it to attract wildlife or an environmental area? Do you want to grow produce or herbs? Is it to be a sensory garden? Sensory plants (with strong scents, bright colours, edible leaves/flowers, an interesting texture or which make a noise in the wind) are good for children generally as well as being excellent for those with special needs (see comment below). Is it to provide shade or is it to display composting? Finally is it for a memorial garden that needs a calming and quiet feel?
- How will the children enter the garden? Will you have more than one entrance? Do you want a gate?
- Hard landscaping
 - What type of paths do you want and where do you want them? Make the paths wide enough for wheelchairs (at least 120cm or 180cm so that two wheelchairs can pass). Consider carefully what materials are used for the surfaces of the paths, they need to be firm, even and non-slip. Self-binding gravel is less harsh than tarmac or concrete.
 - Elements of a building that occasionally obstruct a path close to a building (eg outward opening windows) are hazardous, particularly if the object is transparent. Avoid placing other items on pathways through the garden, such as pots, seats and sculptures.
 - Use a combination of surfaces with different textures as you move from one area to another in the garden. This aids orientation for partially sighted people and also makes the garden more interesting.
 - Will you be able to get funding for a shed or glasshouse and where will you put them?



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- Will you have a pond or water feature?
- Do you want to add a piece/pieces of artwork or sculptures?
- Do you want a fence around the garden? Could you grow a living 'fence' or hedge. Willow can make a nice edge to areas in the garden.
- Decide on shape and position of planting beds
 - Narrow beds (no more than 120cm in width) are good for children as they can reach the middle for planting and weeding from both sides without compacting the soil. If the beds are only accessible from one side then they should be no more than 60cm in width.
 - Consider raised beds.
- Sustainability
 - Try to include a compost heap and water butt.
 - Will it be organic? Chemicals are best avoided where there is the possibility of children either attempting to eat plant parts or putting fingers in their mouths. Be cautious if using animal manures as fertilisers. Liquid plant feeds can be made from nettles or comfrey.
 - Can you recycle anything to use in your garden to make a feature? Old tree stumps can be sculptured to provide a focal point.
 - Reuse items such as car tyres in which plants can be grown.
- Choose your plants
- Produce a detailed plan

Consider those with special needs in your design

The priority is to design entrances, outdoor paths and hard surfaces to accommodate as full a range of special needs as possible and to ensure that children are not denied access to any of the opportunities and activities that the garden offers. Distance is also an important consideration for children with limited stamina and there should be things of interest in the school grounds that are near to the school building. If designing for children with a visual impairment other considerations should be taken into account such as keeping the design simple, incorporating reference points into the plan, using scents sparingly, adding texture changes, using raised edging alongside paths and avoiding steps if possible.



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Implementing your plan

- Clear the site of weeds and rubbish. Be careful at this stage if you involve children. There may be hidden dangers.
- Build your garden!
 - Try to involve the children as much as possible.
 - Make sure labels with the names of the plants are written in a large, easy-to-read font, in lower case and if necessary also in Braille. You could get the children to make the labels. For added interest include the common name and Latin name of the plant, plus what it may be called elsewhere in the world.

Maintaining the garden

- Who will look after the garden? Don't forget the school holidays!
- How do you prevent vandalism? Involving the community in your garden project and giving children ownership of the garden help.
- Keep the paths in good repair and make sure that there are no overhanging branches.
- Remember to monitor and evaluate your garden and add to it or improve/change it as and when necessary.

Don't forget to keep records at each stage of the development –especially photographic ones. You may need these later to enter competitions or apply for funding!

Useful organisations

Garden Organic

Ryton Organic Gardens

Coventry

CV8 3LG

Tel: 024 7630 8238

email: enquiry@schoolsorganic.net

Web: www.schoolsorganic.net or www.gardenorganic.org.uk

They have a membership scheme similar to ours called Organic garden for schools. You can register for free on their website.



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Learning through Landscapes

Third Floor
Southside Offices
The Law Courts
Winchester SO23 9DL
Tel: 01962 846258
Web: www.ltl.org.uk

County Gardens Trusts
www.gardenstrusts.org.uk

It is possible to join this organisation which offers many useful resources. However, there is a fee to join.

Thrive

The Geoffrey Udall Centre
Beech Hill
Reading
RG7 2AT
0118 988 5688
www.thrive.org.uk

Thrive is a national charity whose aim is to assist those who are disadvantaged by ability, circumstance or age to become a welcomed and valued part of society through gardening.

National Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens

The Greenhouse
Hereford Street
Bedminster
Bristol BS3 4NA
Tel: 0117 9231800
Web: www.farmgarden.org.uk

National Society of Allotments and Leisure Gardeners

www.nsalg.org.uk

Groundwork

www.groundwork.org.uk
Environmental regeneration charity

Growing Schools Initiative (DfES)

www.teachernet.gov.uk/growingschools



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Further reading

Bradley, Clare *Fun With Gardening* (Southwater, 1996)

Brown, Maggi *Growing Naturally* (Southgate, 1996)

DFEE *School Grounds A Guide To Good Practice* (DFEE, 1997)

Matthews, Clare *Great Gardens For Kids* (Hamlyn, 2002)

Pattinson, Jennifer *Schools Organic Gardens* (The Association for Science Education, 1996)

