Reap the Benefits

Farm to School

- Connect schools with local farms. Farm to School programs offer opportunities to improve student nutrition, provide nutrition education that will last a lifetime, and support local farmers.
- Use the school garden to introduce students to agriculture. Explore the path from farm to fork.
- Visit a local farm or farmers market.
- Invite a local farmer to talk with the students.
- Work with Child Nutrition to highlight on the school menu when seasonal local items are served.

Connect to the Classroom

- Use curricula that connect the garden and classroom and align with the Standard Course of Study.
- Engage teachers and students in garden activities.
- Encourage garden time for each class.
- Be creative with garden projects. Stimulate learning.

Share the Harvest

- Sell produce or plants from the garden as a school fundraiser. Sales must not compete with school meals.
- Share the bounty of the school garden with a local food bank or pantry.

For more school garden info, visit www.nutritionnc.com.

Developed by the Nutrition Services Branch with funding from Child Nutrition Services, NCDPI

School Gardens in North Carolina

Growing healthy students

Plant

Grow

Learn

Planting seeds for life-long learning

School Gardens

School gardens are effective learning tools that create opportunities for children to discover fresh food, make healthier food choices and be more active. Gardens offer dynamic settings for class curriculum activities that integrate science, environmental studies, math, reading, nutrition, health and physical activity. If you choose to do a school garden, the following tips will help guide you.

Get Permission

- Get permission before starting a school garden. You will need to check with the school principal and possibly additional school administrators. You may also need to find out about school district policies, joint use guidelines, local zoning and other regulations affecting gardens.

Consider Safety

- Investigate liability issues and insurance costs and requirements. It may or may not be possible to cover the garden under the current school or district insurance policy. There will be differences with liability and insurance if the garden is developed on school property versus a community site to which the school has access or is allowed to use for class activities.
- Follow federal, state and local health and sanitation regulations. Do not assume that any produce or herbs grown can be eaten by students and staff in either the classroom or cafeteria. Check with your local health department and your school district Child Nutrition Director.
- Instruct staff, students and volunteers on how to follow safety guidelines.

Before You Plant

Do Some Homework

- Examine the green space, water and sunlight available for a garden. These resources will affect the location, size and type of garden. Other options may need to be explored such as a classroom container garden or greenhouse.
- Visit successful school and community gardens to get ideas and ask questions.

Make a Plan

- Create rules and guidelines so everyone understands how the garden operates. Determine how decisions will be made about the garden, what can be grown, what materials can be used, whether herbicides or pesticides will be used, what the hours of the garden will be, how the garden will be maintained, how volunteers will be organized and when they will work in the garden, and what will be done with any garden surplus.
- Define and write down your plan for the garden. Include the purpose for the garden, goals for growth, what types of plants will be used, if the garden will be seasonal or year-round, and whether harvest can occur during the school year.
- Include school administration, teachers and staff; Child Nutrition Services; parents and students in the planning process. Their buy-in is necessary for a successful school garden.

Build a Foundation

Organize a Garden Committee and Volunteer Base

- Define specific talents and expertise of each member of the committee and support group. List specific needs/wants and have individuals commit to those areas.
- Establish a projects list, realistic timeline for completion of tasks, and specific objectives for students in the garden.
- Recruit gardeners and volunteers. Seek partners such as the local health department, hospital, Parks & Recreation, community groups, faith organizations, or businesses.
- Enlist the expertise of your county's Cooperative Extension Service or a Master Gardener Program.
- Find out what the local school district policy and guidelines are for visitors and volunteers. Take steps to ensure that the policies are followed for the safety of the students, staff and garden workers.

Select a Garden Site

- Choose a site that is easily accessible, receives direct sunlight for 6 to 7 hours daily, is clear of trees and roots, and has good water drainage. Check for proximity of a safe water source.
- Call local utilities and the school district for existence and location of underground utilities.

Design Your Garden

- Sketch out a plan for the entire area. Consider a greenhouse; individual class beds; beds for annual crops of produce and flowers; theme gardens for butterfly and larval plants; herbs; an orchard area; space for native plants and berry patches; and habitats for birds, insects, snakes and frogs.
- Consider fencing, composting and worm bins, a tool shed, benches and a shaded outdoor classroom.
- Be sure paths are wheelchair accessible - 36 inches.

Determine the Cost of Labor and Materials

- Organic planting mix for raised planters - Multiply bed length x width x depth in feet and divide by 27 to get the number of cubic yards of soil needed.
- Soil amendments for in-ground planting - Add 4 to 6 inches of compost to well-dug soil (mix with existing soil).
- Pea gravel (2 to 3 inches) - Use to line garden beds where voles may be a problem.
- Wood chips or other materials - Use for garden paths.
- Irrigation components and controllers - You may use simple, non-electrical timers or battery operated controllers.
- Rain barrels
- Seeds and plants
- Suggested Tool List (minimum): 3-4 turning forks, 3-4 shovels, small trowels (1 per student), 1-2 hoes, 1-2 rakes, small buckets, wheelbarrow, plant labels, watering cans, hoses and gentle spray nozzles

Plant Seeds

Raise Funds

- Determine start-up and maintenance costs and what funds are immediately available.
- If necessary, divide the garden project into phases as funds and energy permit.
- Determine who will track the budget. See if there is an accounting system established with the school.
- Make a list of needed items and a list of possible local resources - PTA, parents, and local vendors. Seek in-kind gifts of seeds, mulch, tools, etc.
- Obtain a list of grant proposals. Determine who will research, write and facilitate the grant.

Promote the Garden

- Hold a kick-off event.
- Present at a staff or PTA meeting.
- Post information on the school website.
- Include a blurb in the school newsletter.
- Schedule and publicize community work days.
- Have students make posters to put around school with work dates.
- Send out e-mails. Follow up with a phone tree.

Cultivate the Garden

- Ask volunteers to bring needed tools including saws, hammers, post hole diggers, wheelbarrows, shovels, spades, pickaxes, and spading forks.
- For building projects, identify an experienced builder or carpenter to organize workers. Identify those with plumbing, electrical and irrigation expertise.
- Seek advice from your local Cooperative Extension for appropriate plants, planting schedules, seeds and seedling sources, and soil analysis.
- Remove any unwanted current vegetation from the garden site. Move current landscaping or native plants to another appropriate site on school grounds. Try to avoid using herbicides of any kind. Use mulch around plants to reduce weed growth. Remove weeds early before they flower and seed.
- Take steps in preparation, planting and maintenance to minimize pests and the need for pesticides.
- For vole control, line in-ground planting or raised beds with 2 to 3 inches of pea gravel.
- If planting directly in the ground, turn over soil to a depth of 18 inches, adding 4 to 6 inches of compost and soil amendments as needed (based on soil test).
- If using raised planters, fill with organic planting mix.
- Install a drip irrigation system and controller.
- Spread wood chips or other material on garden paths.
- Build a fence and gate. Install a garden sign.
- Have students start planting. Make sure students are involved in each step of the process!