



GROW WELL

SCHOOL GARDENS

A thriving edible garden can awaken students' natural curiosity, help increase fruit and vegetable consumption, and engage faculty and parents across the curriculum and community. GrowWELL provides resources to support the maintenance and academic integration. Additionally, GrowWELL outlines strategies to use your school garden to become LearnWELL and align with the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) wellness policies. Whether you are a seasoned green thumb or have trouble using a watering can, GrowWELL provides tools for the full spectrum of gardeners.



POLICY

CPS School Garden Policy Recommendations

The Office of Student Health and Wellness (OSHW) recommends that all school gardens are well-maintained and fully integrated into the classroom and school culture. Additionally, schools should:

- Review the CPS Food Safety requirements if you are or plan to serve produce in the dining center.
- Integrate your garden into every grade level and content area to create as many learning opportunities for your garden as possible.
- Maintain a garden team of at least three staff members to coordinate the upkeep of the garden.
- Use your garden for community engagement.
- Ensure staff attend at least two school garden professional development opportunities annually.
- Allocate resources for garden upkeep on an annual basis.
- Weave the garden into the school culture.

The School Garden Team

The backbone of a successful and sustainable garden program is the garden team. Your garden team should include students, parents, community partners, administrators, school dining staff and volunteers. A great way to organize your team is designate responsibilities for the following roles:

- Community outreach
- Volunteer Coordinator
- Event logistics/planning
- Supplies
- Food safety
- Maintenance scheduling and communications

Tips:

- **Push for broad attendance at garden meetings.** Many hands make for light work - the bigger the team, the better!
- **Stick to a consistent schedule and meeting location.** Consistency makes it easier for new comers to participate and the team to plan; try every Tuesday right after school.
- **Incentivize participation when possible.** Include healthy snacks or fun games during gardening sessions. Snacks can be provided by a different team member each week, or it can be a potluck!
- **Host meetings in the garden.** Staff meetings, garden team meetings, department meetings; meet in the garden as often as possible, a lot of weeding can happen just before and after your session. This is a simple way to engage staff that may not be comfortable with utilizing the garden.
- **Visit other gardens and urban farms in your community.** You can even organize weekend bike tours!
- **Utilize technology!** A shared google calendar can be a great way to organize work days, regular maintenance, and garden meetings.

Chicago Specific Gardening Resources

RESOURCE

A variety of resources are available whether you're planting your first seeds or are a seasoned grower. Check out these local resources or contact studentwellness@cps.edu to learn more about:

- **Community-based garden partner organizations**
- **List of preferred CPS vendors that can provide garden equipment and services**
- **Eat What You Grow certification program - become trained to safely eat garden produce with your student**
- **Green Teacher Network - ask questions of fellow school gardeners and learn about upcoming workshops and events**
- **Advocates for Urban Agriculture - stay connected to the larger community of growers in Chicagoland**
- **University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener Program**
- **On-site technical assistance from the Office of Student Health and Wellness**



RESOURCE

Gardening Questions?

These resources are a great place to start when you can't find someone to ask:

- **Extension Horticulture page - web.extension.illinois.edu/state/programarea.cfm?ProgramAreaID=14**
- **growveg.com - garden tips, calendars, and other resources**
- **American Community Gardening Association - communitygarden.org/resources/**
- **National Gardening Association - www.garden.org/**
- **Cornell Extension - www.gardening.cornell.edu/**
- **Growing Minds - growing-minds.org/tips-for-gardening-with-students/**
- **National School Garden Network - sites.google.com/site/nationalschoolgardennetwork/home**
- **lifelab.org**
- **Green Teacher Network - connect with other teachers at free workshops and events**
- **edweb.org**

Maintenance

A well maintained garden is seeded, weeded, pruned and watered regularly. Gardens can come in any shape and size, but it is important to plan as a team. Starting small will allow the garden to expand as the team expands. Crop selection can dramatically affect your maintenance needs. Please see the “Bright Ideas for Garden Planning” for suggestions on choosing plants appropriate to your school’s maintenance capacity.

Tips:

- Water regularly - delegate responsibilities among the team and plan to water every other day.
- Water consistently. Inconsistent watering can lead to issues, like root-rot, that will cut your garden season short.
- Consider drip irrigation and mulch to suppress weed growth and conserve water.
- Weed regularly to minimize competition for the nutrients in the soil and help avoid pests.
- Check for pests every time you are in the garden - remove them when you see them; if they persist, consult the “Gardening Questions” resource section.
- Give your plants enough space, go up for extra room - train your tomatoes and trellis your vines.
- Put your garden to bed if you do not have capacity to maintain it during the summer. Select crops that grow quickly, plant in the spring, and harvest. Once you’ve finished your final harvest of the school year, remove all plants (roots, weeds, everything), gently till your soil, and cover your garden with a light layer of leaves or mulch. This helps prevent insects and diseases, retain soil quality and generally keeps your garden looking great all year round!
- Plan ahead for the garden’s annual needs - mulch, compost, seeds and seedlings. Be sure to allocate a budget, fundraise, solicit donations or produce it all yourself!



RESOURCE

Funding Opportunities

Keep a wish-list of your garden needs and share it often - with the LSC, with parents, with local businesses - it can also be a great way to spur conversation about your garden! Check out these sites for fundraising ideas:

- schoolgardenwizard.org/wizard/plan/funds.php
- www.kidsgardening.org/node/3954

These sites are a great place to begin searching for grants:

- www.sparkpe.org/grants/grantfunding-resources/
- gardenabcs.com/Grants.html
- grants.kidsgardening.org/

***Please see our list of preferred vendors when purchasing supplies for your garden.**

Integration

A school garden is a dynamic space to learn and play. Learning in all core subject areas can be enhanced by anchoring projects to the garden and its cycle. Read in the garden, make observations in the garden, measure the garden, practice yoga in the garden, discuss the history of the plants - there are many educational components within a garden that can align with Common Core Learning Standards. The garden is a space to be creative, to grow food and to enjoy! Check out the resources section at the end of this chapter for books, lessons and curriculum portals.

Wellness

Use your garden to become LearnWELL and align with CPS Wellness policies using the following strategies.

- **School Leadership:** Connect your garden team with your wellness team.
- **Parent Engagement:** Have at least one non-staff volunteer on the garden team.
- **Physical Education:** Discuss the muscles and movements required for turning soil, getting near the ground, weeding and other garden activities.
- **Frequent Movement Breaks:** Take your students on at least on weeding blitz a month, get active and maintain the garden - all at the same time!
- **Outdoor Play/Outdoor Learning:** Teach in the garden, enjoy recess in the garden - the garden is part of a larger outdoor space that should be explored.
- **Nutrition Education:** The garden is a natural place for nutrition education. Regularly incorporate nutrition education into any garden activities.
- **School Food:** Eat from the garden! Become *Eat What You Grow* certified and serve garden produce in the dining center or for snacks.



Eat What You Grow!

The Eat What You Grow school garden food safety program provides protocols and guidance that, once completed, certifies schools to eat garden produce with their students. The program involves:

- Orientation to food safety - live presentation
- Comprehensive food safety manual
- Technical Assistance and follow-up support

To register for the next training, please contact Student Wellness at studentwellness@cps.edu.

BRIGHT
IDEAS

Bright Ideas for Garden Planning Guides

Below are three recommended vegetable garden models that feature plants appropriate for students, incorporation into the dining center and the Chicago growing seasons.

If your school is or plans to become certified and participate in the *Eat What You Grow* program, it is recommended to grow a **30-Day Salad Garden**. This model also works well when the garden is put to bed for the summer (removing all plants and covering your garden with a light layer of leaves or mulch), avoiding the perils of extreme heat and infrequent watering.

If your school is still trying to establish a robust garden team, the **Perennial Salad Garden** requires little maintenance and keeps your edible garden looking great. These plants will grow back year after year without the need to seed!

If you are using your garden as a tool for parent or community engagement, the **Community Salad Garden** is useful because it requires a dedicated team willing to volunteer over the summer to ensure its survival.

30-Day Salad Garden

Variety	Direct Seed	Plants/sq ft	Harvest	Tips
Arugula	Early April	6 plants spaced 4 inches apart	Clip one inch above soil.	Harvest early, when leaves are 4-6 inches.
Cilantro	Mid-April	4 plants spaced 6 inches apart	Clip the outside stalks and allow the inner ones to grow.	Cilantro loves water. When it's ready to seed, you have coriander.
Dill	Late April	4 plants spaced 6 inches apart	Harvest the stalk before flowers bloom.	Save the seeds for next year's harvest.
Lettuce	Mid April	4 plants spaced 6 inches apart	Clip two inches above the soil.	Lettuce can be harvested up to three times, about every two weeks after the first harvest.
Mustard Greens	Early April	4 plants spaced 6 inches apart	Clip one inch above the soil.	Greens can be harvested up to three times, about every two weeks after the first harvest.
Radish	Early April	6 plants spaced 4 inches apart	Clean off the "shoulders" then twist and pull.	Be sure to give them space.
Rainbow Chard	Early April	2 plants spaced 8 inches apart	Harvest at the base of the colorful stem.	Harvest the outer stalks and allow the inner ones to continue to grow.
Spinach	Early April	4 plants spaced 6 inches apart	Harvest outer leaves so inner leaves may grow for future harvests. Harvest the entire plant when seed stalks begin forming.	Plant broad-leaf spinach in the spring and fall and New Zealand spinach in the warm summer.



Perennial Salad Garden

Perennial crops come back year after year and are relatively low maintenance. These varieties can be difficult to cultivate from seed - consider purchasing pre-started plants, or better yet, ask a fellow gardener to dig up a portion of their plants (don't feel bad, they'll grow back next year!) that you can transplant into your garden. Transplant crops in early spring, after the last frost date.

Variety	Harvest	Tips
Peppermint	Leaves can be eaten raw or steeped in tea.	Monitor as they spread or this will take over!
New Zealand Spinach	Harvest outer leaves so inner leaves may grow for future harvests. Harvest the entire plant when seed stalks begin forming.	Harvest leaves when they are young.
Ground Cherries	When the fruit begin to soften inside their thin paper shell.	Monitor as they spread or this will take over!
Strawberries	When the fruit becomes deep red and soften.	Monitor as they spread or this will take over!
Walking Onion	Try them at different stages for different flavors.	Monitor as they spread or this will take over!
Asparagus	Harvest early when the shoots are 3-6 inches.	You'll have to wait a couple years for your first harvest but after that it keeps on coming!

Favorite Salad Garden

These popular crops are easily identifiable and incredibly productive!

Variety	Start/ Transplant	Plants/sq ft	Harvest	Tips
Kale	Early March/ Early April	6 plants spaced 4-5 inches apart	Harvest outer/lower leaves to allow new growth for future harvests.	Let the plant go to seed in the fall. It will seed itself!
Cucumber	Early March/ Early April	1 plant	Harvest when small for best flavor.	Trellis early to keep the fruit off the ground.
Cherry Tomatoes	Mid-March/ Mid-April	1 plant	Harvest as soon as tomatoes turn deep red - if they begin to split they are over ripe.	Prune early to encourage a strong central stalk.
Pole Beans	Mid-March/ Mid-April	2 plants spaced 8 inches apart	Harvest when beans are long, full and no longer sticky.	Trellis early to keep the fruit off the ground.
Carmen Peppers	Mid-March/ Mid-April	2 plants spaced 8 inches apart	Harvest as soon as peppers turn deep red.	This variety loves sun!
Collard Greens	Mid-March/ Mid-April	2 plants spaced 8 inches apart	Harvest when leaves are 6 inches or longer!	These greens stay good on the stalk for a long time. Don't harvest them until you are ready to eat them!



RESOURCE

Online Curriculum Connections

Try these websites for lessons and activities for every grade level and subject area:

- University of Georgia Extension Service - K-8 All Subjects - extension.uga.edu/k12/school-gardens/curriculum/index.cfm
- Eat.Think.Grow - K-5 All Subjects - eatthinkgrow.org/
- Edible School Yard: K-12 All Subjects - edibleschoolyard.org/resources-tools
- Kids Gardening: K-12 All Subjects - www.kidsgardening.org/lesson-and-activity-ideas#
- Garden ABC's: K-12 - Ag/Science/Environmental Ed - gardenabcs.com/Lessons.html
- Good Food: K-12 Ag/Science/Environmental Ed - firstschoolgarden.org/for-teachers/lesson-plans/

Books for your Garden:

Try these trusted books for simple activity ideas and guides for gardening with students:

- Junior Master Gardeners: Health and Nutrition from the Garden - jmgkids.us/curriculum/
- Junior Master Gardeners: Gardener Handbook - jmgkids.us/curriculum/
- Junior Master Gardeners: Literature in the Garden - jmgkids.us/curriculum/
- Growing Food: linking food and the environment blogs.tc.columbia.edu/cfe/education/nutrition-curriculum/growing-food/
- Botany on your Plate: Investigating the plants we eat! - www.gardeningwithkids.org/botany-on-your-plate.html
- Fearless Food Gardening – from the Peterson Garden Project - salsa3.salsalabs.com/o/50363/t/13349/shop/item.jsp?storefront_KEY=371&t=&store_item_KEY=1498
- The Growing Classroom: Garden-Based Science and Nutrition Activity Guide - www.lifelab.org/store/curriculum/
- Math in the Garden: Hands-on Activities that bring Math to life - www.gardeningwithkids.org/math-in-the-garden.html
- Square foot Gardening: With Kids! - www.gardeningwithkids.org/square-foot-gardening.html

Resources specifically for our youngest learners in the Garden:

Try these trusted resources to support your early childhood garden program:

- The Harvest Birds by Blanca Lopez de Mariscal, pictures by Enrique Flores. Children's Book Press, 1995, 0-516-80131-6 (trade), \$14.95
- The Maybe Garden by Kimberly Burke-Weiner, illustrations by Fredika Spillman. Beyond Words Publishing, 1992, 0-941831-56-6, \$14.95 (\$7.95, paper)
- Mrs. Rose's Garden by Elaine Greenstein. Simon & Schuster, 1996, 0-689-80215-3, \$15.00
- Over Under in the Garden by Pat Schories. Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1996, 0-374-35677-7, \$16.00
- Tops & Bottoms by Janet Stevens. Harcourt Brace, 1995, 0-252-92851-0, \$15.00

Lessons & Activities

- edibleschoolyard.org/resources-tools
- eatthinkgrow.org
- growing-minds.org/preschool-lesson-plans/
- www.agintheclassroom.org/teacherresources/TeacherResources.shtml
- www.farmtopreschool.org/curricula.html