

Planning Your School Garden



Planning a school garden is an exciting project that fosters hands-on learning, environmental stewardship, and community engagement. A school garden is more than a place to grow plants; it's a dynamic outdoor classroom where students can explore science, ecology, nutrition, and even art. By involving students, teachers, parents, and community members in the planning process, a school garden can become a vibrant, collaborative space that enriches learning and promotes well-being. Planning a successful garden requires thoughtful preparation and a shared vision. This guide will walk you through the key steps and considerations to set up your school garden for a successful and lasting impact.

One of the first necessary steps to planning a school garden is to appoint an individual who is knowledgeable in Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and Food Safety. This individual should be the designated Person in Charge (PIC) of the garden, responsible for managing and overseeing daily operations of the garden. The PIC can access [Guidelines for School Gardens](#) for a step-by-step guide in managing a safe school garden.

The PIC cannot act alone. A successful and productive school garden requires the cooperation of many individuals to help plan, support, maintain, and develop. Stakeholders, such as administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community members can help ensure the present and future realization of the garden. This group of like-minded individuals can serve as resources in the creation of a garden committee. Most garden committees are made up of 6 – 12 members.

A garden committee should be established for setting up measurable goals and objectives for the school garden. Some of these goals, such as student engagement, learning objectives, garden maintenance, special features, and themes will be addressed in other publications. These goals and objectives should be presented to the school principal for review and approval before moving forward on garden design. The Food and Agriculture Association is a [good resource](#) for how to form strong goals and objectives in a school garden.

An annual garden committee meeting led by the PIC or garden coordinator is a good practice for evaluating what is working well and what needs to be done in the upcoming season. Making a table for each member to fill out throughout the season for discussion with the group at the annual meeting will bring clarity and organization. See Table 2 for example entries below.

Garden Elements	Success or Failure	Suggestions for Improvement	Future Garden Wish List
Garden Hose/Bib	Failure	Install closer to beds/longer hose	Herb spiral garden
Outdoor Classroom	Success	Plenty of shade. Need more seating.	Tool shed

Table 2: Annual Garden Assessment

Following the end of the meeting, a simple report should be written, summarizing goals and objectives met, timeline of future improvements, or any other pertinent information. This information can also be presented in a school newsletter, or at PTO meetings to update parents and community members on the progress of the school garden and any upcoming needs. If appropriate, photos of student events or garden progress could be included.

The Arizona Department of Health Services School Garden Program has a free certification for school gardens. If bringing school garden produce into the school cafeteria is part of the garden plan, certification makes it easy and safe to do so. Through certification, school gardens can use best growing and harvesting practices so that the foods are safe to eat and serve. These best practices should be specific to the garden being planned. More information about getting a school garden certification can be found at the following website: [Free Arizona School Garden Certification](#)