



The Dirt on Planning and Growing Edible School Gardens at WCPSS





SCHOOL GARDENS

Taking Root in Wake County



Edible school gardens bring learning to life for students! Gardens enable teachers to incorporate experiential learning into the curriculum across all subject areas, and they help students explore connections between education, food and health.

Research shows that edible school gardens:

- significantly increase science achievement scores,
- have a positive impact on behavior,
- increase interest in eating fruits and vegetables,
- increase knowledge about nutritional benefits of fruits and vegetables,
- improve social skills, and
- improve life skills.

Schools in the Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) may “dig in” to edible school gardening to bring all of these benefits to students through an outdoor learning environment. This fact sheet highlights key considerations in planning a school garden, the approvals process, and what schools can expect in terms of garden maintenance and harvesting.

STEP 1

Form a Planning Committee

The first step in starting an edible school garden is to form a committee of dedicated people with the skills and knowledge to help make the garden a reality. Enlist people who will help sustain the garden. Develop a strong support base by

including key people in the planning process, starting with administration, teachers, parents, grandparents and students.

STEP 2

Define a Purpose, Objectives & Values

Kids love to dig in the dirt and often learn best with interactive, hands-on projects. Gardens are a great tool for teachers to introduce a range of educational concepts from math to science,

social studies to literature, art to health.

Each school garden should fulfill a need or objective within the school’s curricula or school improvement plan. Be sure to identify these needs before starting the garden to guide the planning and implementation. This garden purpose statement from a Wake County school is an excellent example wsgarden.webs.com/ourgoals.htm.

STEP 3

Create a Plan

Where to grow? How to design the garden? Your planning should address the garden site(s), growing cycles, maintenance and safety.

Consider whether you will plant in the ground, raised beds, planter boxes, in containers or in a

combination of these ways. When choosing your garden site, be certain there are at least six hours of full sun per day and access to water.

Use Google Earth to identify 2-3 areas on your school site you are considering for the garden. Submit a sketch to Elizabeth Sharpe, WCPSS Senior Facility Planner, esharpe@wcpss.net, for verification that the locations do not conflict with utility easements, future mobile unit space or other required zoning features. If the locations are approved, you may complete a more detailed plan and submit that through the Facilities Modification Request process. (See Step 4)

When are we gardening? Think about your school calendar and whether you will grow year-round or from September – May. Consider holidays and summer break; traditional calendar schools can maintain gardens year-round when they involve families/the community and make it part of their plan.

Who maintains the garden? Your school will be responsible for maintaining the garden. WCPSS Environmental & Grounds staff will **not** build, water, weed, mulch, or otherwise maintain the garden. This includes the removal of the garden if it is no longer being used.

What are our garden rules? It is crucial that the safety and wellbeing of students, teachers, volunteers and everyone involved is always top of mind. Create garden rules to post in order to protect those working in the garden, the plants and produce. Consider the following safety guidelines when creating your plan.

Safety and the Garden

Remember safety first and follow these garden rules:

- Place a secured fence around the garden. (This is a best practice, but not a requirement.)
- Store tools and supplies in a shed – do not allow children in the shed. (All sheds must be approved through the Facilities Modification Request process and permitted through the Wake County Permitting office.)
- Use child-sized tools – teach correct use.
- Use organic practices.
- Wash hands or use hand sanitizer before and after gardening.
- Wear gardening gloves to work in the garden.
- Use only potable water to water fruits and veggies.
- Do not use animal manure in the vegetable garden.
- Compost correctly at the correct temperature.
- Harvest using disposable plastic food service gloves.
- Do not eat in the garden.
- Place harvested fruits and veggies in sanitized containers, buckets, or bags (food storage bags).
- Wash all produce under running water before eating.
- Refrigerate produce.
- No running in the garden.

More detailed information about school garden food safety can be found online in **Food Safety for School + Community Gardens – A Handbook for Beginning and Veteran Garden Organizers**, published by NC State University and NC Cooperative Extension.

STEP 4

Get Approval from WCPSS

After your principal approves a garden plan and proposal, complete the WCPSS Facilities Modification Request Form (www.wcpss.net/Page/255) and submit it to esharpe@wcpss.net for approval. Submit your

school site plan with up to three possible garden site options as well. Contact Ms. Sharpe via email with questions.

Funding for Modifications: Your school or PTA will need to provide a funding source for any modifications requested; plan accordingly. Schools or PTAs may raise funds for projects or apply for grants from local and national foundations. If schools or PTAs wish to apply for grant funding, they need to contact Dr. Angie Wright in the Office of Grants for WCPSS, 919-431-7207. Note that schools need to receive approval through Facilities for the garden **before** applying for a grant. Schools will include information about the type of grant that will be associated with the garden project on the Facilities Modification form.

Funding partnerships with local businesses (particularly those in close proximity to the school) are welcomed as well.

STEP 5

Organize the Garden & Activities

Know your objectives from the get-go. This will help with overall planning and when coordinating activities and lesson plans. Also remember that it's important to assign work tasks to group members and allocate space in the garden appropriately.

Lessons/Curriculum Resources:

- **K-5 – WCPSS Science Wiki** wakek5science.pbworks.com
- **K-8 – Life Lab** www.lifelab.org/content-standards
- **The Edible Schoolyard** edibleschoolyard.org/resources-tools
- **Pre-K-12 – Collective School Garden Network** www.csgn.org/curriculum

STEP 6

Stick to the Plan & Grow Your Garden Adventure

Continue to raise awareness of the garden within your school and community. Invite staff and students to volunteer work days. Involve students at all grade levels in planning, planting and harvesting the garden. Consider forming a before- or after-school garden club for even more benefits and engagement. Research other school gardens to get ideas for how to improve your garden.

Support & Your Community

Identify faculty, parents and community members who enjoy gardening as a hobby or profession. You'll be surprised to learn how many people are willing to share their knowledge and experience about gardening. Enlist help from gardening clubs, gardening centers and Extension Master Gardeners of Wake County.

Also try recruiting local organizations and businesses to sponsor the garden – even if it's just a section or row. Consider what help you need the most (equipment, volunteers, money) and don't be afraid to ask for it. Many provide in-kind donations to help school gardeners.

Funding

Secure financial support for all activities and materials needed to build and maintain the garden – construction, seeds, transplants, educational materials, tools, equipment, organic materials and fertilizer are just a few to consider. Local and national grants are available to help fund community and school garden programs. Fundraising events and campaigns are also great ways to finance edible gardens. Again, your community is likely to support your garden with a variety of in-kind donations too.



SCHOOL GARDEN Q & A

> **Can we eat the foods we grow in our school garden?**

Yes! Teachers, students and volunteers may eat the fruits, vegetables and herbs from the garden in the classroom and incorporate them into classroom learning and celebrations.

> **Can our cafeteria serve foods from our school garden?**

No. All produce served on the serving line in the cafeteria must be Good Agricultural Practices-certified and grown by an approved NC Farm to School farmer working with WCPSS Child Nutrition Services.

> **Can we donate foods we grow in the garden?**

Yes! Schools may donate excess produce to community partners who distribute fresh produce to those in need. Your school may wish to sign on to Plant a Row for the Hungry. Visit foodshuttle.org to learn more.

> **Will WCPSS help build garden beds or maintain our gardens?**

No. Your school will be responsible for maintaining your garden, including building, soil amendments, mulching, watering, weeding, etc.

> **Does WCPSS provide tools for school gardens?**

No. Your school must provide its own tools. Families, staff, local garden centers and businesses may donate gently used or new tools, or your school may purchase gardening tools.

> **Can we plant in containers, raised beds, planter boxes and directly in the soil?**

Yes! If you plant in containers, boxes or rolling raised beds that are housed on an existing concrete pad of some kind, you do not need to contact WCPSS Facilities. If you are building raised beds or boxes that will be stationary or planting directly into the ground at your school, you will need WCPSS approval through the Facilities Modification Request process.

Several local resources have ideas for garden beds, including:

- Natural Learning Initiative: naturalearning.org/content/raised-planters-timber-construction
- Constructing Easy and Inexpensive Raised Garden Beds! by Kathleen Hebert (search AHA's website)
- Many local schools have gardens onsite to spark the imagination.

References & Resources

> **Advocates for Health in Action (AHA)**

Materials on starting and maintaining school gardens, including resources from AHA's Dig In! and other sources.

www.advocatesforhealthinaction.org/fuel-your-school

> **Grow For It**

This NC 4H program provides resources to connect youth and educators to agriculture. www.growforit.org

> **The Grow Zone –**

Willow Springs Elementary School Garden

Great information on curriculum, funding, sources and gardening ideas. wsesgarden.webs.com

> **NC Ag in the Classroom**

Resources, lesson plans, grant opportunities and more for NC teachers. ncagintheclassroom.com

> **Growing Minds**

Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project resources for teachers. growing-minds.org

> **Kids Gardening**

Lesson plans, ideas, grants and more. www.kidsgardening.org

> **Durham Public Schools Hub Farm**

On-site programming for grades K-12 at this 30-acre farm, woodland and aquatic habitat and food farm.

www.thehubfarm.org

> **NC Botanical Garden**

On-site educational programming for school groups and training for teachers. ncbg.unc.edu

> **National Farm to School Network**

School garden resources available. farmtoschool.org



Advocates for Health in Action is a group of diverse 75 organizations and community members working to increase access to healthy food and physical activity through policy, systems and environmental change in Wake County.

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www.AdvocatesforHealthinAction.org

