



# How to Start a School Garden

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School gardens are effective learning tools to help educate our children in the preservation and protection of a healthy environment and clean watershed. To further that end, the following condensed checklist has been compiled to assist educators, administrators, parents and community volunteers in setting up a school or youth garden.

For more information, contact Cathy Sinclair at UCCE Marin Master Gardeners, 499-4227, or e-mail at [csinclair5@earthlink.net](mailto:csinclair5@earthlink.net).

## ORGANIZE A GARDEN COMMITTEE AND SUPPORT BASE

Include administration, teachers, parents and students in the planning process.

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 time-line for completion of tasks and specific objectives for students in the garden. Visit successful school gardens to get ideas and ask questions.

## SELECT GARDEN SITE

A good site is easily accessible, receives direct sunshine for 6 to 7 hours daily, clear of trees and roots, with good water drainage. Check for proximity of water source.

Call PG&E and school district for existence and location of underground utilities.

## DESIGN YOUR GARDEN

START SMALL. Develop general feel of garden ... will there be individual class beds, theme gardens, tool shed, green house?

Is installing fencing necessary? Sketch out plan for entire area including: beds for annual crops of vegetables and flowers; theme gardens for butterfly and larval plants, medicinal and culinary herbs, teas, edible flowers; orchard area; permanent areas to include native plants and berry patches (habitats for birds, insects, snakes, frogs, etc.).

Be sure to include composting and worm bins, tool shed, benches, shaded outdoor classroom. If necessary, divide into phases as funds and energy permit.

Make sure paths are wheelchair accessible, 36" wide.

## DETERMINE COST OF LABOR AND MATERIALS

Organic planting mix for raised planters (multiply bed length times width times depth in feet; divide by 27 to get number of cubic yards of soil needed). Soil amendments for in-ground planting (add 4 to 6 inches of compost to well dug soil and mix with existing soil).

Hardware cloth (1/4-inch wire mesh) to line raised beds where gophers are a problem.

Wood chips or other materials for garden paths (most tree companies are glad to donate chips).

Irrigation components and controllers (can use simple, non-electrical timers, or battery-operated controllers, costing \$20-\$30 and \$40-\$50 respectively).

Seeds and plants.

Suggested Tool List (minimum): Small trowels, one per student; watering cans; 3-4 shovels; 3-4 turning forks; wheelbarrow; small buckets; 1-2 hoes; 1-2 rakes; plant labels are a good art project; hoses and gentle spray nozzles.

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ECoM's Marin Food System's Project

Contact: Leah Smith Phone: 415-663-1338 Email: [lsmith@malt.org](mailto:lsmith@malt.org)

## FUNDRAISING

Determine start-up and maintenance costs, and what funds are immediately available. Is there a system established with the school regarding accounting? Determine who will keep track of the budget.

Make list of needed items and a list of possible local resources; PTA, parents, local vendors.

Obtain list of grant proposals; determine who will research, write and facilitate the grant.

## GARDEN

Schedule and publicize community work days, with rain dates if necessary; follow up with phone tree. Have students make posters to put around school with work dates.

For building projects, identify an experienced carpenter or builder in the group to organize workers. Identify those with plumbing, electrical and irrigation knowledge and skills. Ask volunteers to bring needed tools including saws, hammers, post hole digger, wheelbarrows, shovels, spades, pickaxes, digging bars, and spading forks (depending on tasks being done).

Remove any unwanted current vegetation from the garden site. If there are native plants that will need to be moved, call Marin Master Gardeners' School Garden Coordinator at 499-4227. **DO NOT USE HERBICIDES** of any kind to kill weeds. They are toxic not only to weeds, but to our watersheds and our children!

If gopher control needed, install 1/4" hardware cloth 12 inches deep for in-ground planting, or use raised planters with 1/4" hardware cloth on bottom. If planting directly in ground, turn over soil to a depth of 18", adding 4" to 6" of soil amendments as needed (based on soil type). If constructing raised planters, fill with organic planting mix.

Install drip irrigation system and controller. Spread wood chips or other material on garden paths. Build fence and gate; install sign.

Contact UCCE Marin Master Gardener office at 499-4227 for advice on appropriate plants, planting schedules, seed and seedling sources, etc.

## ***HAVE STUDENTS START PLANTING!!!***

***Make sure that the students are involved in each step of the process whenever possible!***

***MOST IMPORTANT ... Have Fun!***

