

COURSE INTRODUCTION

Welcome to your training on starting and sustaining your school gardening program!

The purpose of this curriculum is to introduce you to general approaches and strategies for starting and sustaining a school gardening program. A successful school gardening program involves a variety of people including teachers, students, parents, and sometimes community members and agencies who have an interest in creating an outdoor classroom where learning of all kinds can take place. The goal of this course is to equip you with the knowledge and resources to help you find the allies you'll need to design and sustain a gardening program that works for your school.

The Guiding Principles of this curriculum are as follows:

1. School gardening programs should be built to benefit students as a primary goal, but will likely have positive impacts on teachers, school/afterschool staff, parents, and the greater community.
2. All garden planning should be done with the goal of creating a long-lasting program.
3. The strength of a gardening program comes from welcoming a wide range of partners and partnerships.

1. School gardening programs should be built to benefit students as a primary goal, but will likely have positive impacts on teachers, school/afterschool staff, parents, and the greater community.

School gardening programs ultimately enhance the education of student learners. Life Lab Science Program founding director Roberta Jaffe summarized the benefits to students well in her forward to "The Growing Classroom":

"[Garden-based learning] nurtures children's curiosity and desire to explore the world. It also prepares children for the future by helping them ask relevant questions; develop processes for thinking and searching for answers; and communicate and work cooperatively. As students learn and apply basic academic skills in the garden, they incorporate learning processes that help them be informed, knowledgeable, responsible citizens."

However, students are not the only ones who benefit from gardening programs. The foundation of a strong garden program is an active team of garden program supporters and leaders, and these people often benefit as well. In recruiting help for a gardening program, you'll want to be able to convince them of the benefits to students, themselves and others.

2. All garden planning should be done with the goal of creating a long-lasting program.

We often use the word "sustainable" in describing a strong garden program. This word simply means the program has the ability to exist, thrive, and serve the target audiences for many years. This curriculum is designed to help you build a garden that is set up to succeed for the long term. All too often a great school garden is started by a lone parent or teacher, even supported by the administration, yet the garden goes fallow after the garden champion leaves the school. This is a great loss considering the hard work necessary to start a garden program and the benefits it provides to the school and community. Sustainability is therefore a primary goal in all aspects of this curriculum and we will revisit this concept repeatedly.





3. The strength of a gardening program comes from welcoming a wide-range of partners and partnerships.

A school garden program cannot be built and maintained by one or two champions alone. It is necessary to create collaboration among a variety of groups, such as parents, students, teachers, administrators, custodial staff, food service staff, and community members. By actively involving representatives from each of these groups in all stages and aspects of garden program planning, you will create a garden program that everyone can feel proud of and connected to. In addition, you'll need a variety of garden program leaders to carry out the various tasks and avoid burnout on the part of any one person. We'll give you suggestions to help you include, recognize, attend to and benefit from the involvement of these different groups at every stage of garden development and maintenance.

Course Overview

In Lessons 1 and 2, we'll give you information on garden program benefits, community-building techniques, and successful school gardens that you can emulate. These existing sites can help you identify gardening program benefits, partners, and strategies for gaining support and involvement. In Lessons 3 and 4, we'll get into the details of creating and sustaining the garden itself, through fundraising and maintenance. In Lesson 5, we'll discuss involvement of the community and introduce the idea of joint-use gardens, i.e., gardens that provide some plots for school use and some plots for community use. Finally in Lessons 6, 7 and 8, we'll teach you strategies for making the garden a key part of the school environment, by connecting it to the classroom, the cafeteria, and after school programs.

Activity Note:

One helpful homework assignment would be for participants to do some research to find and read their own district's wellness policy and/or school garden policy. Wellness policies aren't covered in this manual until the last lesson, but you'll want time for participants to do this research and bring it back to the group for discussion on what they find.

Reference

1. Jaffe, R. and G. Appel. 2007. *The Growing Classroom: Garden-Based Science*. South Burlington, VT: National Gardening Association.