

LESSON 5

Community Partnerships, Volunteers and Joint Use

Establishing partnerships between the school gardening program and other community groups and organizations can greatly strengthen the program. Partnerships often create greater commitment and ownership of the garden within the school setting and greater community, making the garden's chance for survival much more likely, even once a "champion" parent or teacher leaves. Partnerships can greatly enhance the educational possibilities of the gardening program, in ways that we'll discuss below. As we mentioned in Lesson 2, a garden leadership team should have participants from a variety of stakeholder groups. In this lesson, we discuss how to connect to community organizations and volunteers to support a traditional school garden or to create a joint use garden. In a joint use garden model, a nonprofit or government agency partner with a school to operate a garden that is used as both a school garden and community garden.

One important take-away point that applies to all forms of community and volunteer involvement in the garden is that there are always safety concerns when bringing people onto the school campus. Administrators have legitimate concern for student wellbeing and safety, so it's important to work with the administration to make sure volunteers go through the proper background and safety procedures. A joint use garden will trigger additional safety concerns, including those mentioned above, that you should anticipate and take seriously. If as an organizer, you recognize the concerns of the administrators in the establishment of a joint use garden, you can more easily work to create a system that works for all parties.

Learning Objectives

1. Understand important considerations for using volunteers at a school garden.
2. Identify several possible local organizations that could be garden partners.
3. Understand the benefits, challenges, and considerations of joint use agreements.

Volunteers in the Gardening Program:

Safety Concerns

Schools are always careful when it comes to allowing volunteers to work with students, whether in the classroom, the garden, or elsewhere. The school is liable if something happens to a student, so they need to know who is interacting with their students at all times. Depending on the form of involvement by the volunteer, a district may require some combination of:

- Photo ID and sign-in at the school
- Megan's Law check (registered sex offender database)
- Tuberculosis (TB) test clearance
- Background check
- Fingerprinting

Factors that determine which of these steps a volunteer must go through are:

- One-time or ongoing volunteer position
- volunteer position will take place in the classroom
- volunteer position will work directly with students
- volunteer position will have unsupervised time with students

Generally, the place to find out the exact requirements and start the paperwork is at the school site itself. Most often volunteers must pay for the TB test while the school may pay for other costs, but this also depends on the district.



A useful resource on recruiting, training, and utilizing volunteers in the school garden is the Master Gardeners' manual "Plant a Seed and Watch it Grow", particularly the "Getting Started" section. The manual is available at: www.mastergardenerssandiego.org/schools/gardenbook/main.html

Local Organizations and Volunteers

- School gardens can benefit from the support of both individuals and local organizations. The following are several San Diego local organizations that might be good partners for getting your school gardening program going and for putting the garden to good use. Partnerships that can provide pre-screened volunteers (volunteers who already had a background check for their respective organization, which would apply to your school, too) are always the most convenient partners for local school districts. Also see the supplement entitled "San Diego County School Garden Resources" for more ideas on who to contact and what they can provide.
- University of California Cooperative Extension (cesandiego.ucdavis.edu) is an established, state-based organization with a great deal of agricultural knowledge. They can provide curriculum information and technical assistance in designing and building the garden itself.
- San Diego Master Gardeners (www.mastergardenerssandiego.org) provides school garden support as one of its primary activities. They are available for curriculum information, teacher training, and one-on-one technical assistance including garden visits.
- Victory Gardens San Diego (www.victorygardenssandiego.com) is a local nonprofit that can provide volunteer effort to help build the garden, as well as a website with many gardening resources.
- Aging and Independence Services (www.sdcounty.ca.gov/hhsa/programs/ais) is a service of the County of San Diego that can be a great resource for acquiring the assistance of older adults in the garden as volunteers and developing intergenerational learning.
- San Diego Community Garden Network (sandiegocommunitygardennetwork.org) is a local nonprofit that can connect you to a network of gardeners, particularly community gardeners. Community gardeners will be a beneficial resource if exploring the joint use garden concept. San Diego Community Garden Network can provide group liability insurance (more detail on this below).
- National FFA Organization (aka Future Farmers of America) (www.ffa.org) is a national organization with state and local chapters, dedicated to facilitating agricultural education, that may be interested in the garden as a space for its outreach programs.
- 4-H (www.4-h.org) is the youth development branch of the nation's Cooperative Extension Program, which is focused on science, citizenship, and healthy living for kids. They may also be interested in the garden as a space for their programs.
- San Diego Ag in the Classroom (www.sdfarmbureau.org/AgintheClassroom/Ag-in-the-Classroom.php) is a county-based nonprofit organization aimed at increasing the ag literacy of our students. They may also use the garden space, or be a potential source of funding and/or instructors and volunteers.
- California Rare Fruit Growers, San Diego Chapter (www.crfgsandiego.org) is dedicated to educating about rare fruits, researching locally-appropriate varieties, and propagating and distributing plants. Periodically this group gives away young fruit trees to schools and nonprofits (check the website for opportunities), and they may also be a source of guest speakers/activity leaders related to fruit trees.



Joint Use Agreements

The term joint-use refers to two or more entities, such as a school and a nonprofit or government agency, formally or informally agreeing to share indoor or outdoor spaces like gymnasiums, athletic fields, and gardens. Both schools and their partners can benefit from the shared responsibility for facilities maintenance, and the resources that each can attract to help build programs supporting nutrition and physical activity.

The term “joint-use garden” refers specifically to a garden that serves as both a school garden and a community garden. It can be located on school property or other public or private lands. Typically, there are some plots designated for community residents and others for school use.

A joint-use agreement or in many cases a license, shared use, or real property agreement between the school district and a group of community gardeners (typically represented by a nonprofit organization or government agency) is created to detail roles and responsibilities, maintenance procedures, and liability procedures for the partners – the school district and the nonprofit organization or government agency. A school district and community organization that decide to share use of a garden at a particular school site can allow the school and community to use the garden at the same time or at separate times of the day to avoid gardener-student interaction, but some benefits are lost in this case.

Community gardeners allowed to garden during school hours may be required to adhere to the requirements outlined above. Joint use inherently requires more organization than a traditional school garden. There are more interests and concerns to address, but there can be many benefits for all involved that make the negotiations worthwhile.

Benefits of Joint Use

- School property is wonderful open space for community gardening, especially when land for community gardens is scarce.
- Having more gardeners responsible for and invested in the garden makes maintenance easier, especially during summer and other school vacations.
- Students gain the opportunity to interact with and learn from community members, especially older adults and people from an array of ethnic backgrounds.
- Teachers and after-school staff gain from having gardening expertise close at hand.
- Community gardeners get a way to contribute to their neighborhood and local youth by sharing their knowledge, in addition to the opportunity to grow healthy food for themselves.
- For many gardeners, especially parents and grandparents, the garden enhances their connection to the school, their neighbors, and the community.
- The entire community shares in the pride that comes from having a thriving garden on campus.



For more on joint-use gardens, please see the San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative web site at: www.OurCommunityOurKids.org. It includes resources on garden benefits, joint use, sample agreements, and joint use garden models. Additional resources on joint use can be found at:

- National Policy and Legal Analysis Network to Prevent Childhood Obesity: www.nplanonline.org/nplan/joint-use
- Prevention Institute, JointUse.Org: www.jointuse.org/home
- California Project Lean: www.californiaprojectlean.org/doc.asp?id=224&parentid=221
- Center for Cities and Schools: citiesandschools.berkeley.edu

Planning for Joint Use

If you're interested in pursuing a joint use garden at your school, it's important to know the considerations that the school and its district will have so that you can address these concerns from the outset. Please refer to Gardening 201: How to Start and Manage Community Gardens for more detailed information on organizing the community gardening aspects of the garden.

1. **Types of partnerships:** Joint use partnerships can be formal (based on a legal document) or informal (based on a handshake), but formal agreements can be more appealing to both parties because of their built-in legal protections. School and organizational staffing change over time, so an informal agreement between a school staff member and community members is not the best method to guarantee that community gardeners will have access to the garden into the future. A formal agreement can also help prevent future misunderstandings surrounding maintenance, operations, liability, ownership, and cost. Typically a school district would enter into an agreement with an established nonprofit or government agency. There are instances in some communities where school districts have worked directly with community residents or neighborhood associations to make land available for gardening such as Pixley Union Elementary School District and Sacramento City Unified School District. For more on this approach and sample agreements, please see the San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative web site.
2. **Legal considerations of schools:** School districts may be reluctant to open school property to community members, concerned about the legal risks of having adults unaffiliated with the school engaging with students as well as the costs associated with potential injury or property damage. The good news is that California state law actually offers school districts strong protections against liability through the Tort Claims Act and requires that schools and organized groups using school facilities carry liability insurance. School districts can minimize their risk by carefully maintaining their property, carrying insurance, requiring groups who use their property to maintain insurance, entering into formal joint use agreements, and treating gardeners officially as volunteers, as described above. Knowing these legal guidelines may help encourage a reluctant administrator to accept a joint use agreement.
3. **Accessibility of the garden space:** Typically in San Diego, school properties are fenced off, which means community gardeners would need a way to gain access to the property before and/or after school hours and on weekends. Community gardeners can be given a key with a deposit (to discourage loss of keys) or the code to a combination lock, where the code can be changed periodically to ensure security. In four joint use garden (i.e., school-community garden) pilot projects conducted under Healthy WorksSM, each site proposed to have the garden fenced with separate entrances from both school and community access points. These decisions will likely have to be negotiated between school districts and their respective partner(s) to reach a reasonable and safe solution.



4. **Steps to take for joint use:** There's no single path to developing a joint use agreement, and crafting a successful one requires care, cooperation, and ongoing communication among the partners as they address concerns and work out logistics. The first step is something you'll do anyway: bring together key stakeholders to talk about and define their vision for the project and begin building relationships. People to include are school and district leaders, teachers, after-school staff, parents, community residents, and representatives from city government and local nonprofits. If the vision, mission, and goals for the garden program seem feasible, you'll work with school district and school leadership to draft a joint-use, a license, shared use, or real property agreement that clearly spells out each partners' roles and responsibilities.
5. **Good examples:** There are strong existing examples of shared garden spaces in places like Seattle (www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/ppatch/), Denver (www.dug.org), and communities throughout California (see the San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative web site) that you can discuss with your district to encourage similar types of collaborative opportunities. Each model is different. In Seattle, community gardens invite schools to have a plot or plots and the normal plot fee is waived for youth gardeners. In Denver, the gardens are on school property, with community gardeners approved as official school volunteers who can serve as onsite experts to help students and teachers learn and grow their gardens. In California, the models range from community gardens on school property to school-community gardens on public parkland adjacent to a school.

Joint-Use Garden Maintenance Ideas

A joint-use garden can have a different method for ongoing maintenance than a typical school garden because the community gardeners provide an additional source of maintenance labor.

The following are just a few ideas for how to use community gardener assistance most effectively:

1. Include guidelines for expected maintenance of one's individual plot in the contract that garden plot holders sign. Rules for maintenance might include limits on how long the plot can be untended, maintaining the plot free of pests/weeds/disease, keeping gardening contained to one's assigned space, efficient water use, and approved chemical use. Teachers and students should also know at what level they're expected to maintain their plots. (Because you'll be integrating use and care of the plots into the curriculum, maintenance of school plots doesn't have to be a chore, it can be part of the learning.)
2. Require plot holders to spend some time caring for common areas and/or school plots, especially during school vacations, but during the school year too. One of the benefits of joint use is greater ease maintaining the garden during summer and other breaks. Required maintenance could be organized as one or several of the following, or others that you think of:
 - a. Required number of common area maintenance hours per month or year
 - b. Signing up for responsibility to maintain the garden for a particular week of school vacation as individuals or pairs
 - c. Required attendance at some number of group work parties
3. Create and post a routine garden maintenance schedule in the garden. The schedule can relay information related to planting and harvesting seasons and when certain plants and common areas should be tended to.

