

LESSON 7

Before - and After-school Garden Clubs

Before- and after-school programs need activities for long hours before and after school. Gardens are an excellent way for staff and students to integrate school day concepts, get physical activity, observe seasonal changes and help sustain a program that the school and community enjoy.

While many after-school programs like the idea of gardening, often staff does not have experience with gardening and may be intimidated by the perceived work involved. Administrators and program directors can encourage after-school staff by providing training and mentorship in gardening and garden education. We encourage after-school staff to attend a Gardening 101 class or work with a RGECC site to set up a class at your school site. Alternatively, you might plan a workshop for after-school staff with an experienced local gardener to teach them the basics of gardening. You may also identify local community members who have gardening experience to volunteer with the after-school program. A good way to increase visibility and school participation in the garden is to start a Green Team or Garden Club that uses the garden for simple and fun activities that help maintain the garden and teach students gardening skills.

Learning Objective

1. Learn tips for before- and after-school program staff to use the garden.

Tips for Staff

Before and after-school staff often lack garden-specific training and knowledge to lead students in activities in the garden. They may have valuable skills for working with students outdoors in larger groups, but they may be anxious about introducing tools and other garden-specific issues. The following are some suggestions to help direct before- and after-school activities to be successful in contributing to the garden program overall:

- Use some of the same standards-based and subject-based activities discussed in Lesson 6 in the after-school program (see the resources table in Lesson 6). Because the group will likely be diverse ages, modify the activities to help facilitate mentorship of younger students by older, more experienced students. Keep students engaged by having 2-3 prepared activities for the particular day that vary in theme and level of activity, so students can find tasks that match their energy level and interests.
- Use teamwork activities. Team activities are a great way to learn cooperation and help keep a larger group of students focused. Some wonderful activity examples for elementary school students are available in the curriculum Growing Classroom. For activities for older students check out the books and resources from The Food Project (thefoodproject.org/food-project-toolbox).
- A garden club or green team for students can be a way to help students feel excited about the garden and responsible for its care. If starting a garden club or green team, identify particularly enthusiastic and capable after-school staff, parents and older students who need service learning units, and nurture their participation by giving them special training and responsibilities. Their participation can help create a garden culture in the after-school program. Some clubs even purchased t-shirts to proudly identify themselves as garden team members. Help these identified staff connect with gardening mentors in the community, including Master Gardeners.
- Help after-school staff plan multiple activities, structured and unstructured, that they can use in a pinch, when kids lose interest, or when a planned activity finishes quickly. There are always tasks to be done in the garden (weeding, watering, turning compost, removing dead flowers, harvesting seeds and produce, addressing pest problems, etc), so staff should decide on some of these and some backup structured activities before starting their planned activities, in case they need to start something new on the fly. Some activities are included in Life Lab's excellent videos: www.lifelab.org/2010/01/back-pocket-garden-activities.



- Document the work of the garden team/club through photos and notes so that when staff change, new staff can continue garden work with the students with guidance from past experience. Older students can be in charge of photography and documenting.
- Make sure at least one member of the after-school staff is part of the garden leadership team (Lesson 2). A successful gardening program requires clear communication between all garden users. Participation in the garden team means the views of after-school staff and their students are represented, AND after-school staff can coordinate their activities with others, especially teachers. The garden leadership team should also be sure to publicly acknowledge the contributions of the after-school staff in helping care for the garden.
- Plan garden-based celebratory events that highlight the after-school program and its use of the garden. Harvest events and other similar events (more in Lesson 8) can feature the efforts of the after-school program to create more pride in the program.

