

Easy Steps for Teachers: Creating a Classroom Garden

- 1- **Start early.** Make plans for your garden in *January*. Think about where and what you're going to plant, as well as resources in your community. Who might donate a few seed packets? Who could help with preparing the seed bed if your students aren't old enough? You may want to contact your local high school or community college. Students in Ag programs could potentially offer labor, plants and/or planting advice. Garden Club members can often offer their time to give you an extra hand. Start with a small space, turning over the soil with a shovel. To reduce weeds remove grass and roots as you turn the soil or cover it with plastic for a month before hand. Most soils that sustain grass are fine for growing vegetables. You may want to incorporate some compost into the soil if available.
- 2- **Send home a wish list** with your students. Many parents have old tools lying around that they don't use or would be happy to donate seeds, gloves, compost or mulch.
- 3- **Tell teachers and administration about what you are doing.** Showing your school's administration and other teachers how you are tying the garden into curriculum will build support and encouragement. You might even inspire others to get involved!
- 4- **Start small.** The first year that you do a garden with your students, don't feel pressure to have a big harvest. You don't have to plant lots of different crops. Classroom gardens should be more about the experience and magic of planting rather than what is produced. A small successful project is something you can build on each year.
- 5- **Planting in the classroom.** Some types of plants need to be started indoors months before they can be planted outside. Most seed packages will give you a recommendation as to when seeds should be planted and if they need to be started indoors. If you have good light or grow lamps you and your students can plant "starts" beginning in February. If you don't start seeds yourself, you can buy starts at tailgate markets or greenhouses beginning in April. ASAP's Growing Minds website (www.growing-minds.org) has lesson plans (correlated to standard course of study objectives for 3rd grade) that walks you through the process of doing starts in the classroom.

6- **Choose a few things to plant:**

The following are considered “cool season vegetables”, which can be directly seeded outside in *March* or *April*:

Lettuce	Chard	Radishes
Collard greens	Mustard greens	Carrots
Kale	Spinach	Peas
Spring Mix	Beets	Potatoes

All of these veggies should be ready to harvest (except potatoes, which are dug in the late summer/fall) before school lets out!

The following fruits and vegetables are considered “warm season”, and can be planted in *May*, after the danger of frost has passed. Make sure to check the seed packages, because many warm season plants (such as tomatoes and peppers) need to be started indoors or purchased as transplants. Most of these crops will not be ready to harvest until into the summer or fall:

(including tomatoes, squash, melons, beans, etc.).

Tomatoes	Beans	Peppers
Squash	Melons	Pumpkins
Zucchini	Gourds	Eggplant

- 7- **Lesson plans.** ASAP’s Growing Minds website (www.growing-minds.org) includes a [Lesson Plans](#) page that will help you use hands-on garden experiences to fulfill standard course of study objectives. This site also provides more in-depth information on how to start a school-wide garden program. If you do not have internet access, please contact Emily Jackson or Molly Nicholie for printed information and resources at (828) 236-1282.
- 8- **Upkeep.** Depending on the size of your garden, mulching and weeding can be more than young kids can take care of. If you find that you have more upkeep than you and your students can handle, ask a parent or community volunteer to come in occasionally to help. If you plant summer or fall crops, you may want to enlist a family or volunteer to help maintain your plot over the summer. If not, a weedy garden can be a great source of adventure when students return to school. When it doesn’t rain, make sure to water thoroughly at least once per week so that that soil always stays moist.
- 9- **Routines.** Established routines are great for students and gardens alike. Students look forward to “garden time” and benefit from being involved in maintenance, as well as harvesting. Having “garden time” at least once a week to plant, water, weed, or just observe will ensure your students are engaged in the growing process, and that your garden is getting the attention it needs.
- 10- **Keep it fun!** Students love to work in the garden, and it can be a powerful and fun way to teach concepts from early literacy to math. One look at a child engaged in the wonder of growing or eating vegetables they once scoffed at, and all of the work of planning your garden will pay off!