

10 Best Practices for Sustaining School Community Gardens

1) Location, Location, Location

The most sustainable gardens occupy a highly visible site on or next to school grounds. The site should be well drained with plenty of sunlight, access to water, and minimal soil compaction. Always test soil!

2) Permanence

A colorful and durable sign and a sturdy fence are good first steps toward permanence. Clearly posted rules, regular updates in school newsletters, and successful fundraising and accounting are also key.

3) Organic Gardening

Consider organic practices for the health of your garden and community by avoiding synthetic pesticides and chemical fertilizers. Soil fertility increases through crop rotation, cover crops, and compost.

4) Crop diversity

Plant a variety of vegetables and flowers to support a wide range of beneficial insects and soil microorganisms. Experiment with companion plants that enhance growth or suppress pests.

5) Curriculum Integration

Work with administrators, teachers, and community partners to integrate the garden into Farm to School, Ag in the Classroom, and nutrition programs.

6) Organization

A skilled coordinator and steering committee, effective communications, shared planning and decision making, and youth engagement are essential to a sustainable school community garden.

7) Administrative and school board support

Raise awareness by doing a presentation and garden taste test at the next school board.

8) Commitment

Work for continuous improvement in your garden and educational program annually. Seek feedback.

9) Community access

Involve the community in your garden, especially during the summer. Consider individual garden beds or plots for interested families and weekly summer gathering times.

10) Celebration and acknowledgment

Thank sponsors, volunteers, and donors, and share surplus produce and flowers with neighbors and people in need. Build social capital through garden potlucks and harvest celebrations. Have fun!