

Important Resources for the Development and Sustainability of School Garden Programs¹

John M. Diaz and Erin Elsberry²

Introduction

With demands for more instructional time in the classroom, teachers have less time to dedicate toward coordinating the school garden and, as a result, require support mechanisms. When surveyed, gardening teachers with adequate support were more enthusiastic about the potential of school gardens than teachers who did not garden or lacked support (Graham & Zidenberg-Cherr, 2005). Extension agents serve as a valuable resource in providing teachers with in-service training and technical education to increase their ability to effectively use gardening as an instructional tool. There are numerous variables that directly affect the success and sustainability of a school garden. Barriers include complexity of school gardens, proficiencies with Florida-specific gardening, and availability of resources and knowledge about garden management. As teachers are already overextended with existing responsibilities, it is important to streamline the process of finding school garden resources. Extension agents can bridge these barriers by assisting in the procurement of appropriate resources, fostering collaborative opportunities, and providing education and technical support. Extension's vision is to foster enthusiasm among teachers for school garden programs by removing the barriers that impede the use of the school garden as an instructional tool.

This document provides an outline of important resources to help in the development and sustainability of a school garden program. Resource categories include Extension support, garden planning, curricula, and funding.

Extension Support Resources

There are a diverse set of Extension agents that can provide support to your school garden program. The support can range from supplemental education to technical assistance. Table 1 describes the types of available assistance from UF/IFAS Extension faculty and staff.

Garden Planning

Planning a garden is a difficult task. Understanding how to get started provides a solid foundation for a sustainable school garden program. The resources below will help to inform and guide the planning efforts for various school garden programs (Table 2).

Curriculum

School gardening engages students by providing inquiry-based and experiential learning. School gardens serve as a valuable educational tool in science, math, English, reading, art, music, and social studies. Table 3 outlines curricula to promote garden-based educational activities that address a variety of standards.

1. This document is AEC621, one of a series of the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date May 2017. Revised May 2024. Visit the EDIS website at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> for the currently supported version of this publication.
2. John M. Diaz, assistant professor and Extension specialist, Department of Agricultural Education and Communication; and Erin Elsberry, School Gardens Program regional specialized agent, UF/IFAS Extension Polk County; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. For more information on obtaining other UF/IFAS Extension publications, contact your county's UF/IFAS Extension office. U.S. Department of Agriculture, UF/IFAS Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A & M University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating. Andra Johnson, dean for UF/IFAS Extension.

Funding

While lack of funds is often sighted as a barrier to school garden programs, there are in fact several grant opportunities available. There are a range of opportunities that provide financial resources for garden materials, education, and other supplies. Table 4 outlines some of the opportunities that can be leveraged for a school garden program.

Reference

Graham, H., & Zidenberg-Cherr, S. (2005). California teachers perceive school gardens as an effective nutritional tool to promote healthful eating habits. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 105(11), 1797–1800. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jada.2005.08.034>

Table 1. Types of Extension resources available to teachers.

Type of Assistance	Appropriate Contacts	Website
Florida-specific gardening educational workshops and technical assistance	Horticulture Agent, Master Gardeners, Horticulture Program Assistant/Coordinators	Local UF/IFAS Extension offices
Garden-based nutrition education	Family Nutrition Program (FNP) Educators	FNP in your county
Florida-specific gardening education and resources (i.e., seeds, transplants, soil)	Family Nutrition Program (FNP) Food Systems Specialists	Farm to School and Community

Table 2. Guides for garden program planning.

Organization	Description	Website
Life Lab	A guide for creating school gardens as outdoor classrooms. The guide is available to download digitally in English or Spanish.	Life Lab
Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services—Farm to School	<i>The School Garden Guide—Starting and Sustaining a School Garden</i> in Florida provides a step-by-step process for getting the garden in the ground.	School Garden Guide Gardening Resources page
Florida Ag in the Classroom	The School Garden Resources website provides a garden planning guide and worksheets.	School Garden Resources
UF/IFAS Extension Grow to Learn	This accessible format will guide you, step-by-step, through the stages of successful gardening, from shaping your vision of a garden to building, growing, maintaining, and sustaining it for the long-term.	Grow to Learn Booklet

Table 3. Curricula resources for garden-based experiential activities.

Curriculum Name	Description	Website
The Growing Classroom	Cross-mapped activities to relevant Next Generation Science Standards and Common Core Math and Language Arts Content Standards (available in English and Spanish)	Life Lab Curricula
The Edible Schoolyard Project	An extensive database to search for lesson plans and garden and kitchen classroom activities. An online library contains 6th, 7th, and 8th grade garden and kitchen lessons.	Edible Schoolyard Resources
Learn, Grow, Eat, Go	An interdisciplinary program that combines academic achievement, gardening, nutrient-dense food experiences, physical activity, and school and family engagement.	Learn, Grow, Eat, Go
Harvest of the Month	A collection of instructional materials highlighting a different Florida fruit or vegetable that is in season during that month.	Harvest of the Month
Gardening for Grades	An online teacher resource center. Curriculum resources include Gardening for Grades, hands-on lessons correlated to education standards.	Gardening for Grades
Gardening for Nutrition	A comprehensive guide for Florida educators designed to teach health, science, language arts, math, and more using a school garden.	Gardening for Nutrition

Table 4. Grant opportunities that support school gardens.

Funding Organization	Description	Website
Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) Splash Grant	Provides up to \$3,000 per school to enhance student knowledge of water resource issues.	Splash School Grants
Florida Ag in the Classroom	Teachers are eligible to apply for \$500 mini grants, which are awarded on a first-come, first-served basis.	FAITC Mini-grants
Whole Kids Foundation	The school garden grant provides \$3,000 to support a new or existing edible garden on campus.	School Garden Grant Program
Bonnie Plants	Third grade teachers can register to receive free cabbage transplants.	Bonnie Cabbage Program
Fiskars Project Orange Thumb	The grant provides tools and resources to help communities reach their goals for collaboration, neighborhood beautification, and healthy, sustainable food sources.	Project Orange Thumb
Scott's Miracle Gro Grants	The grant provides up to \$1,500 for community garden projects, including school gardens.	Scotts Miracle Gro
Lowe's Small Toolbox for Education	The Lowe's Small Toolbox for Education grant provides up to \$5,000.	Lowe's Toolbox
The Donald Samuell Classroom Herb Garden Grant	Public and/or private 3rd through 6th grade teachers, with classes of a minimum of fifteen (15) students may apply for a \$200 herb garden grant.	Herb Society
Seeds of Change	To have your organization considered for this program, you must first apply. The award process includes a public voting forum.	Seeds of Change
American Academy of Dermatology	Grants up to \$8,000 are available to public schools for installing permanent shade structures for outdoor locations that are not protected from the sun.	AAD Shade Structure