

# Getting Started

## Assemble Your Team

You can't do it all (at least not for long). The risk of having only a few people involved with the school garden is that if one of those people leaves the school, the garden project falls apart. The most successful school gardens have a team of people working on different aspects of the project. Every school garden team looks a little different, but most of them include the following roles:

- **Team Leader:** This can be a parent, someone from a non-profit or government agency you are partnering with, a teacher or staff member, school administrator, or even an older student. The team leader has ownership over the project, schedules meetings, identifies project needs, and keeps the team on track.
- **School Administration:** In most cases, school administrators do not need or want to be involved with the garden on a daily basis. However, their support is crucial to the long-term success of the project. Keep administrators updated so that they can promote the garden to parents, board members, and the media.
- **Teachers:** Involving teachers from the beginning will ensure the garden project supports student learning objectives across the school.
- **School Food Service:** Collaborate with school food service staff so that the garden can support the school meals program. Discuss crops to grow, quantity, estimated harvest time, food safety practices, product quality, and other logistics. If you are at a district, you will likely need to involve both the kitchen manager at the school and the district food service director.
- **Gardening Experts:** It's hard to use a garden for learning if it doesn't grow. If you don't have any gardening experts among parents or school staff (or if they don't have time to participate), reach out to the Master Gardener program with your county's Extension Services. They can assist with soil tests, provide fact sheets and growing resources for your region, and are occasionally available to provide training. You may also want to contact local universities to see if they have horticulture or landscape architecture students looking for volunteer hours.
- **Promoters and Fundraisers:** People in this role don't need to know how to garden, they just need to understand the benefits of school gardens and be able to enthusiastically communicate them. You need someone who can apply for grants, plan fundraisers, and get the rest of the school community excited about the garden.



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## Team Members, continued

- Maintenance/Custodial Staff: These staff members can help locate valuable resources like storage closets and water sources. Also, because the maintenance staff frequently work year round, they can help keep an eye on gardens during breaks and vacations. If these staff members are involved in the planning process, they will be less likely to view it as an inconvenience or an unnecessary addition to their workload.
- Students: The garden is ultimately for them, so be sure to get their input. You may be surprised by the ideas they have.

## Plan Your Garden

Gardens don't grow overnight. Set goals as a team for what you would like to accomplish this season, in one year, and in three years, and work backwards to create a plan. In addition to keeping the team on track, having a detailed written plan will help you obtain funding. As you create your plan, keep these questions in mind:

- How will the garden be integrated into the cafeteria?
- How will the garden be integrated into the curriculum?
- What strategies will you use to keep the garden active during the winter? Possible solutions include:
  - Season extenders such as hoop houses, hydroponics, and aquaponics.
  - Turning compost, composting additional cafeteria waste, and learning about decomposition.
  - Planting cover crops and learning about regenerative agriculture
- What is your plan for summer? Possible solutions include:
  - Plant low maintenance crops in the spring that can be harvested in the fall, such as pumpkins.
  - Invite families to use the space as a community garden over the summer—in exchange for maintaining some plots over the summer, they receive space to grow food for themselves.
  - Consider a work study program—the food service department can hire older students to both farm and process/preserve crops over the summer.
  - If the school site serves summer meals, this is a fantastic opportunity to open the garden to the community for volunteer hours.
- Plan the actual garden.
  - What is your budget?
  - Choose a location and layout for the garden, considering food safety and accessibility.
  - Consider sunlight, size, and available resources (supplies, time, and money).
  - What will you plant? Consider the seasons, your growing zone, and input from teachers and school food service.



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## Provide Training

Who will develop the garden? Who can use the garden once it is built and planted? What can they use it for? What are their responsibilities? Use the members of your garden team to provide training to these groups:

- Parents and Volunteers
- Teachers
- Students
- Cafeteria Staff
- Maintenance/Custodial Staff

Consider hosting a community garden work party to kick off the project and get some of the initial physical labor done quickly.

## Learn from Each Season

Use mistakes or plant failures as valuable learning opportunities. Involve students in each stage of the garden—if you need to modify the garden plan based on experience, solicit ideas from students.

## Need help? Want more information?

Visit the Utah Farm to Fork Task Force website,  
[www.utfarmtofork.org](http://www.utfarmtofork.org)

Or email us at [contact@utfarmtofork.org](mailto:contact@utfarmtofork.org)  
We're here to help!



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