



School Garden

SUSTAINABILITY

Directors:

Dorothy Grady-Scarborough
dorothy.mega@gmail.com
662-402-4798

Sunny Baker
edufoodsunny@gmail.com
636-675-0503



NATIONAL
FARM to SCHOOL
NETWORK

MISSISSIPPI

This resource was developed
with support from the
W.K. Kellogg Foundation.



NATIONAL CENTER
FOR APPROPRIATE
TECHNOLOGY

Hello, fellow school gardeners, & happy spring!

Many of you are elated and overjoyed at your beautiful gardens as they bloom this year. You've gotten funding and you've bought seeds, transplants, garden supplies, equipment and utensils. You've planted, and you've prayed; the rain has come and now the garden has grown. In a few weeks, you'll be picking the fruit of your labor.

At the same time, you begin to realize that school will be out in five more weeks. So, the question is:

"What's a garden to do during summer break?"

The main question regarding sustainability is, "How do we keep the school garden program going once it's started?" This sentiment is a major concern among school garden stakeholders. Most of the time, **funding** and **partnerships** are the answer to the sustainability question, so the school gardening committee should focus most of their efforts on these two areas. Thus, the school gardening committee should seek and procure partnerships at the state and local level in order to utilize them for both funding and technical assistance.

Topics:

Being Resourceful

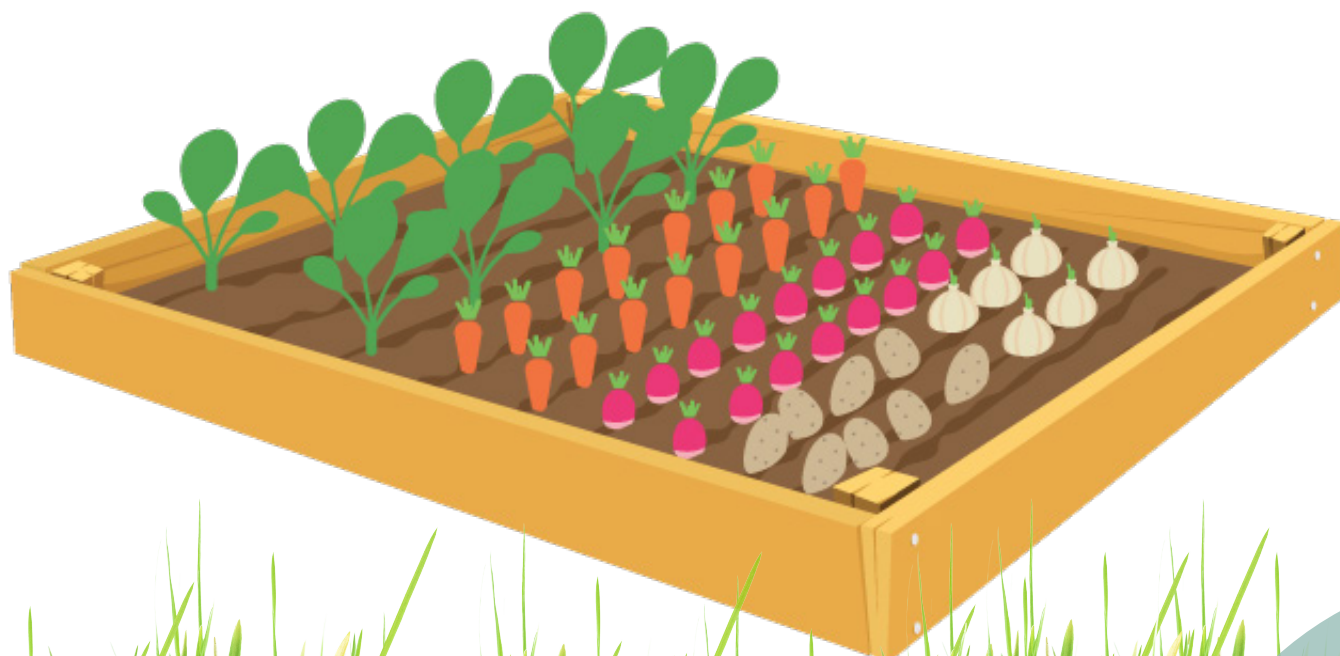
"Who do we need to talk to about this?"

Cultivating Your Vision

"What's our vision, and what do we need to do to achieve those goals?"

Evaluating Your Progress

"How do we know if we're still on the right track?"



BEING RESOURCEFUL

The first step in achieving a sustainable garden is to know who to talk to.

Funding: Donations of money and materials from community members, businesses, and charitable organizations can enhance your outdoor classroom program tremendously. Fundraising may provide a garden aide's stipend, special science equipment, or reference books. Even if you can't get district funds for your outdoor classroom, your tool shed, or your dream greenhouse, there's a good chance you can get someone to donate many of the materials and much of the labor you need. Because most teachers don't have time to be involved in fundraising, many schools rely on the assistance of the community, as will be discussed below.

Volunteers: Volunteers are a major part of successful garden programs. They can help you build a tool shed or fence, organize a fundraiser to pay for a garden aide, contribute gardening expertise, or help you in the classroom. Once you have your volunteers lined up, the next task is to organize them. Ideally, organizing your school garden volunteers will be a task for a volunteer support committee. It can make recruiting, organizing, training, and scheduling volunteers one of its tasks.

While the initial establishment of a volunteer corps can be time consuming, this groundwork will result in an ongoing, dedicated, and reliable group that provides a steady flow of energetic help. The following are helpful tips in maintaining a great team of volunteers:

Let your volunteers observe your gardening classes until they feel comfortable supervising a small group on their own. Keep the number of students per volunteer as low as possible.

Regular volunteer meetings will not only allow you to discuss activities and address problems and questions, but will also let the volunteers know how valuable they are to your program.

Keep parents informed as you plan your outdoor classroom.

Volunteers will come to you with varying degrees of expertise. Some may have experience with children, some with gardening, and others with both.





Partnerships: One of the consistent threads that links all of the educators utilizing school gardens is their ability to partner with others – whether in their schools or community. The main question here is, “Who do we need to bring to the table to implement school gardening in Mississippi?” We have learned from experience that – after school administration and teachers get involved – parents, local businesses, city/county elected officials, nutritionists, FFA, 4-H and the Mississippi Farm Bureau should all be target partners in developing a statewide gardening program. Other partners could include grocery stores, researchers, local home and garden stores, community organizations, and the PTA/PTO, though this list is far from being complete.

Find out how many teachers would like to have their classes participate. They themselves do not need to know much about gardening (if they’re interested in the project at all, their skills and their help will be utilized!). If funding is needed to support the garden, it will be necessary to gain support from your school administration and district board as well.

Locate partners at the state level of government. Contact state government organizations with local branches to help with the program. Specifically, reach out to the Water Management Districts, Department of Environmental Protection and the Institute for Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) at Mississippi State University and Alcorn State University.

Locally, develop a list of potential partners in the school’s area. Be sure to include:

- o Retail organizations – Walmart, Target, Lowes, Home Depot and local garden and feed stores
- o Community people – farmers, retirees, parents
- o Teachers in school for collaboration
- o Auxiliary personnel at school – janitors, cafeteria workers

Communication: Find out who is interested in volunteering to help with summertime garden maintenance by sending out a flyer regarding a planning meeting. Announcing the meeting to local groups (PTA, Rotary Club, teachers, churches, senior citizen centers, local garden clubs, etc.) is even more effective. Likewise, sending flyers home with students lets parents know about your new outdoor classroom and how they might get involved. Ask them for specific types of help, such as expert help in gardening, design, or carpentry, and donations of tools, materials, and supplies.

Develop a document that outlines the expectations of being a partner: what will partnering entail? This can be used to recruit potential partners at the state, county, and local level. Develop a database of partners at the state level of current and prospective program partners.

CULTIVATING YOUR VISION

The vision for the school garden revolves around the following questions:

1. What's the big dream for your school garden?
2. What is its purpose?
3. How will it connect to curriculum?
4. How will it be used daily by students and staff?
5. What will it look like in 3–5 years?
6. How will you get there?

Once you put your vision on paper, share this vision with the school community and begin to plan the steps for achieving it. Make sure your answers to these questions result in goals that are specific, measurable, attainable and relevant to the progress of the program; this will make the evaluation of your work much easier and more effective.

Other sustainable garden pointers include:

- Start small and expand later
- Establish (and maintain) a good water supply and fencing
- Know how the garden will be funded, or how it can pay for itself
- Use organic approaches to improve and conserve the soil
- Choose crops which are adapted to local conditions, match local traditions and food habits, have high nutritional value, contribute to food security, are easy to cultivate and fit the school term
- Make sure there is a takeover garden manager in case of emergency or sickness
- Get trained and experienced teachers and helpers to pass on their knowledge.

EVALUATING YOUR PROGRESS

To determine how closely you've stuck to your garden program's vision, you will need a way to evaluate your progress along the way. To date, there is not a standardized evaluation tool for school gardening programs. In fact, there is not a standard definition of what constitutes a school gardening program at all. It is important that you measure the impact of your garden as it grows. With goals outlined within your vision being specific, measurable, attainable and relevant, your school garden's evaluation component will be tailored to those of your own community. If possible, connect with local colleges or universities for extra help in program evaluation.

What gets
MEASURED
gets
NOTICED!

CONCLUSION

School gardens are tremendously valuable resources, but these programs often face questions concerning whether they can continue from year to year. With the strategies discussed in this booklet implemented, your school garden should be fruitful. We discussed dedicated garden program staffing, community engagement, and other factors that lead to programmatic sustainability. We have learned from successful initiatives to secure corporate sponsorships; community partnerships; legislation; and school or district-level investments that lead to financial sustainability. A bit of advice is that one can join other school garden support organizations and learn best practices for sustaining school gardens. With strong partnerships, continuous flow of funding, volunteers and a well-rounded vision your school garden project should be a success.

Visit us at www.mississippifarmtoschool.org for more resources and information!



**MISSISSIPPI
FARM TO SCHOOL
NETWORK**

**Planting seeds & watching healthy habits
take root in children's lives.**