



Students plant and tend their own fruit and vegetable garden.

Objective

Raise students' awareness of where foods come from, and increase preferences for fruits and vegetables.

The Event

The project starts in the classroom, where students discuss the basics of gardening and the nutritional benefits of fruits and vegetables. A teacher or a volunteer with a green thumb can talk with students about the different ways students can tend to a garden. Team Nutrition offers two garden-related nutrition education curricula for elementary schools (see appendix, pages 94-95), which can be used to connect garden, classroom, and cafeteria experiences together with nutrition.

Student volunteers break into groups and tend to the garden during specified times. Ask student volunteers to monitor the garden's development and report back on its progress. As the food grows, talk about the produce and how it can be prepared.

Planning

Identify a facilitator for the project. The school will need someone to manage the garden. A parent or staff member who enjoys gardening, a Master Gardener with the county Cooperative Extension Office, an area farmer, or a community gardening organization can provide expertise and guidance during the entire growing process. Youth groups, volunteer organizations, and parent volunteers may be able to help establish the garden and maintain it during school breaks and on weekends. Many organizations offer grants for school gardens, which may help offset the costs of your garden activities.

Work with school officials to determine where and when to start your garden. The garden can be outside the school, ideally within a walking distance, or you can use pots in the classroom. Choose which fruits, vegetables, and herbs are the most suitable for growing based on where and when you will plant your garden. For more information on school gardens, see the *Dig In! Gardening Guide* at http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/diginTG_gguide.pdf.

Gather your tools and start scheduling. Assemble seeds, pots, and other supplies as needed. Consider asking community gardening groups for donations. While preparing supplies, identify which classes/grades will participate, and develop a schedule for students to plant and maintain the garden during recess or lunch periods.

Celebrate your harvest. Once the garden's produce is fully grown, students can celebrate tasting what they have grown in the classroom or cafeteria (if district policies permit). If enough food is produced, schools can donate it to a local food pantry.



Team Up Success



School

- Representatives from each class/grade can take turns tending the garden and reporting on its progress through regular updates on the public address system, in the school newspaper, and on the school's Web site.



Classroom



- Kindergarten teachers can help students learn how seeds grow into plants using *Discover MyPlate's Lesson 4: Planting the Seeds for Healthier Eating*. This lesson (see appendix, page 94) is matched to educational standards for core subjects.
- Other elementary school teachers can connect gardening and nutrition education activities to Common Core and other educational standards using Team Nutrition's *The Great Garden Detective Adventure* (grades 3 and 4) and *Dig In!* (grades 5 and 6) curricula (see appendix, page 95). Both resources provide a crosswalk between activities and standards.
- Middle school teachers can use the *Nutrition Voyage: Trek 3, Grade 8: From Farm to You* materials (see appendix, page 95).

Cafeteria



- School nutrition staff can display the food grown from the garden during mealtimes, and can highlight school menu items that incorporate locally grown foods.
- They can also provide the students with instructions on how to prepare and eat the fruits, vegetables, and herbs in the garden, as well as offer recipe cards to take home that involve the garden's foods. For recipe ideas, consult the *Recipes for Healthy Kids Home Cookbook* (see appendix, page 99), *The Great Garden Detective Adventure* (see appendix, page 95), and *Dig In!* curricula (see appendix, page 95).
- In locations where students wait in line, display the *Dig In!* posters promoting fruits and vegetables.

Community



- Area farmers and Master Gardeners with the county Cooperative Extension Office can speak about locally grown foods and teach students how to tend to their plants.
- A local chef or registered dietitian can demonstrate how to prepare some of the fruits and vegetables grown in the garden.
- The harvest can be donated to an area food bank or homeless shelter, if possible.

Team Up for Success (cont'd)



Media

- Direct local news organizations to the school's Web site, where the students' updates about their growing garden can be posted.



Home

- Students can share garden updates and recipes with their families and encourage their families to start a garden at home.
- If your school is using *The Great Garden Detective Adventure* or *Dig In!* curricula (see appendix, page 95), send home the *Garden Detective News* and *Dig In! at Home* parent materials, respectively.

Schools **IN** Action

Approximately 140 students at **North Attleboro Middle School** in **North Attleboro, MA**, started an outdoor garden and managed its fundraising, planting, and harvesting. A small group of students even worked over the summer to maintain the garden while school was out of session. They grew vegetables such as green beans, peppers, and tomatoes, all of which were donated to a local food pantry. **North Attleboro's** garden is now serving as a model for schools across the Nation. The students who have participated in the program mentor other schools that are trying to start their own gardens. For example, students at a middle school in **Philadelphia** held weekly virtual meetings.

Longfellow Elementary School in **Iowa City, IA**, hosted a *Farmer Fair* led by five local farmers and four food/nature instructors. All 320 students in grades K-6 rotated through four lessons throughout the course of an afternoon. Students learned about many aspects of growing their own produce, including how popcorn grows, how to build a composting system, and how different foods grow during different seasons of the year. A local chef prepared samples of butternut squash, carrots, turnips, and sweet potatoes for the students to enjoy.

In **Eastern Idaho**, the **Lillian Valley School**, which serves local Native American children, used a grant to convert a 3,400-square-foot plot of bare soil near the school into a traditional Native American garden. The school also added raised garden beds to grow other vegetables, such as tomatoes and radishes, that most students had never tasted before. The students worked in the garden in the spring and fall, and during summer camps. At school, they were taught nutrition lessons in the classroom, and the school sent packets of nutrition and gardening information home to families. According to one school staff member, "The hands-on experience that our students have had in planting and caring for our garden has given them a desire to at least try new vegetables and not be afraid of new things."



[Photo] **Lillian Valley** students tend crops in their school garden.