

Foster a spirit of invitation and courtesy within the community in order to maintain the energy surrounding the garden program at your school.

### Schedule Workdays

Schedule periodic spring and fall workdays where skilled adult hands can help keep your school garden functioning as an outdoor classroom. Promote workdays in the school newsletter, parent email list, or on an announcement bulletin board within the schools.

### Year-end Garden Party and Volunteer Appreciation

Have a garden party each spring. Invite the entire community: parents, neighbors, students, administration, and teachers. Find a barbeque and a band. Get parents and students to lead fun activities. Take this time to publicly appreciate your garden volunteers from the school year.

### Maintain a Garden Coordinator's Handbook

As you work and teach in your garden, maintain a handbook that can be passed on to others after you. In it, put yearly pictures of staff and their names, copies of old lessons, notes, ideas, and an introduction to the position. Keep track of which lessons worked, and which didn't. These will be valuable reminders down the line.

### Develop a Vision for Your School Garden

Think about your garden five years down the line. How will it be used? How will it connect to curriculum? How will you get there? Share this vision with the school community and begin to lay out a strategy for achieving it.

## How do I sustain the garden over time? What long-term strategies are useful to keep in mind?

### Plan for Summer Maintenance

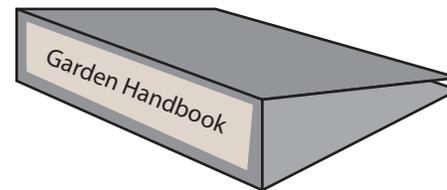
Summer maintenance of a school garden includes different duties, depending on your school community as well as your climate. In areas with mild winters where you can grow year-round, the summer may be a period where the beds lay fallow. They can be mulched with compost and straw and allowed to rest during the dry summer. In areas where the summer is the primary growing season, a maintenance schedule should be created for watering and weeding to carry the crops and other plants over to the fall when the students return. Or perhaps there is a summer program that utilizes the space.

At an end-of-the-year event, have a sign-up sheet ready, divided by the weeks of the summer, and ask parents to take over the garden maintenance for a week or two. Collect their names, contact emails, and phone numbers. Send a brief email highlighting the jobs that need to be done over the summer: watering, weeding, and harvesting (if possible).

### Inventory the Parent Community for Skills and Support

Find skilled adult hands for garden projects. Inventory your parent (or neighborhood) population for arborists, carpenters, plumbers, and landscapers. Inviting parents or interested neighbors to participate in the improvement of the garden space builds ownership and pride in the school.

#### In Your Garden Handbook, Keep Track Of...



- Staff Names and Photos
- Notes on Successful and Less Successful Lessons
- An Introduction to the Position
- Useful Contacts

### Quick Tips for Maintaining Support

- Develop lasting relationships with skilled adult hands in the community.
- Write a regular garden newsletter or e-mail update to send to parents and staff.
- Host fun, routine garden meetings for your garden committee volunteers.
- Host all sorts of events: work parties, neighborhood parties, fundraisers, class parties, and seasonal harvests.
- Post notices about events, volunteer opportunities, and class projects in school bulletins.
- Establish a routine, easy plan for on-going maintenance, including during the summer months.
- Get an article about the garden in a local newspaper.
- Create and maintain relationships with local businesses.
- Seek out and write grants.
- Hold plant and seed sales and sell them after school and at school events.
- Extend gratitude/acknowledgements. Publicly appreciate volunteers at garden parties.
- Make and maintain a school garden website or blog to post photos and keep parents informed.
- Organize and plan for regular garden workdays for parents and students.

### Gather Yearly Feedback From Staff

As the year winds down, a careful evaluation of the program during the past year will help you build on what works in the outdoor classroom, and rethink what doesn't. Ask all teachers who participated in the program to fill out a carefully crafted evaluation form. Try to ask questions that can't just be answered with a simple yes or no. If teachers can't find the time to fill out an evaluation, schedule a time to sit with them and debrief about the year. Evaluations over time are valuable, and will help guide the program so that it improves from year to year.



*Create visible signage that explains the vision for your school garden and helps advertise upcoming events.*



# HEALTHY GARDEN TIPS

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## SMALL SPACE AND CONTAINER MAINTENANCE

By Denise Levine, UCCE Master Gardener

Containers, window boxes and hanging baskets have special needs that are well worth paying attention to when we see the wonderful opportunities that container gardens afford us. Container maintenance consists of: Watering, Pruning and Transplanting, and Feeding.

### WATERING

Window boxes, containers and small raised beds have special watering needs and are completely dependent on you. If window boxes or containers are located under eaves, even watering during the rainy season may be necessary. Additionally, often the reflection of the sun and heat from walls and decks make watching the water needs of your plants very important. These plants may need to be watered twice a day in the warmest weather.

Usually, containers are watered with a soft flow of water until the soil is saturated and excess water runs out the bottom drainage holes. It often works best to lightly water each plant in some general order that leaves no plant out, and then repeat the watering a second time. This gives the surface of the soil a few minutes to soften and makes the water percolation through the soil a little easier. Occasionally, when we follow these directions, water runs out the bottom but the plant is not thriving...often this happens after a hot spell or period of neglect and can mean that the soil mass has dried and contracted, and all the water is draining around it, but not through it. If this has happened to a plant, sit the pot in a container of water until the soil is spongy again. Sometimes loosening the soil around the edges of the pot with a chopstick or fork can help break the crust of soil that results when the surface is too dry.

In order to know how much water your plants need, pay attention to your plants every day. If your finger feels the soil is dry 1 inch from the surface, it is time to water. Remember, it is better to water gently several times as you perhaps walk around your deck or along your hanging baskets, then try to water your plant all in one try. If you have become well acquainted with your plants water needs, some gardeners have been successful with small drip systems on a timer.

### PINCHING, PRUNING AND TRANSPLANTING

Unlike a garden grown plant, a container grown plant must be kept within its bounds. Often this requires pinching or pruning. In the case of a hanging basket of impatiens or mixed basil, pinching back the foliage and dead heading any dead flowers on the impatiens and *any* flowers on the basil, would not only keep the plants producing but would also create bushy full plants to fill in your containers. In the case of a woodier plant, get out your pruning shears or clippers to trim your plant back to a healthy shape.

If pruning is not enough to keep your plants or container garden within its bounds, it may be time to replant. Remember, that when you move a plant from one pot to another, you want a pot that is bigger, but not TOO big. Usually one to two inches larger is enough. Make sure you have more potting soil and if your plant has a large root system, you might need your clippers. Holding your hand over the face of the plant, take the plant from its container. Examine the roots for signs of rot or disease. If the plant is root bound or has excessive roots, and you would like to keep it in the same container, take your clean shears or a sharp knife and cut the roots back by one to two inches on all sides. Then replant in the same container with fresh soil mix. If the plant's root ball appears compacted, cut it vertically

with a sharp knife to encourage roots to move out into the new soil. HINT: When planting several plants in a container, window box or hanging basket, place the thirstier plants toward the back and middle of the boxes where the soil stays moist longer.

## **FERTILIZING**

Because containers need to be watered so often, it is important that we replace the nutrients that leach out. Avoid over fertilization which can result in excess salts. Excess salts can be eliminated by drenching with distilled or rain water.

There are several ways to fertilize and it could depend on how you prefer to water. If you enjoy using a watering can, you can use a dilute fertilizer in your watering can. If you prefer, you can also use a dry granular fertilizer. Whatever type of nutrient you use, remember to read the labels and follow the directions exactly. This is NOT a case where "If a little is good a lot more is better!"

## **DISEASES AND PESTS**

Many gardeners find that their daily watering session is the time to check to see if plants are healthy. Shiny leafed plants often appreciate a rinse and all plants appreciate being looked after. Be sure to lift the leaves and look underneath where pests can be lurking. If you don't see any cause for the damage you notice, get out your magnifying glass or bring a plant sample into the Master Gardener office for help. If you have something contagious, GET RID OF THE PLANT. If you are plagued by disease or spores, bleach your containers before you re-use them and do not re-use the potting soil.

If your plants get too big or stop producing or just look bad you can: (1) start all over or (2) pull out a few of the plants to leave more room for the remaining plants. Postpone total replanting until later. Remember that containers give you permission to change your mind, change your location or change your view. It's up to you.

### **Additional Reading:**

*Pests of Landscape Trees and Shrubs*, UC ANR Publication #3359, 1994.

*Selecting and Growing House Plants*, USDA Home and Garden Bulletin No. 82, 1963.

*Indoor Landscaping with Living Foliage Plants*, Texas A&M University, Publication B-1118, 1972.

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