

NEWS RELEASE

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School Gardens

I've been involved with school gardens since 2001, and have found them to be an excellent outdoor extension of the classroom. Gardens are places where children can take classroom information and transform it into first-hand knowledge.

While working with the UC Davis program "Math in the Garden", I watched children learn about the mathematical principal of a square foot. They saw it written on a chalkboard and listened to their teacher talk about it. In the garden, the "aha" moment was tangible as they took string and measured out an actual square foot.

School gardens can be used to teach math, science, English-language arts and history as well as social development, self-esteem and respect for the natural world. Healthy food choices and nutrition can also be introduced.

All of the California State Standards can be taught in a garden. *A Child's Garden of Standards: Linking School Gardens to California Education Standards, Grades Two Through Six* was published by the California Department of Education. This book identifies specific activities that meet the California State Standards

A school garden can also be a place where parents or grandparents that may feel uncomfortable in an indoor classroom can lend a hand. Everyone has a skill or talent that can be used- from the simple act of digging to planting or insect identification.

Planning a school garden is no easy task; a garden is more than just a plot of ground. There are many questions to be answered, such as "Who will water in the summer? How will we assign tasks? Who will watch the students while they garden? How will parents know when to help? What type of curriculum should be used?"

In fact, a school garden can seem an overwhelming project in the beginning. Careful planning is the key to success. A school garden will need the support of the principal and maintenance staff. Teachers must be willing to allow students to participate, and parents, grandparents and community members will be needed to help supervise students in the garden.

The backbone of every school garden is a Garden Coordinator. This person is usually a parent who can donate at least 20 hours per week to organizing the program. A Garden Coordinator meets with school faculty and decides what type of curriculum should be used in the garden program.

A coordinator for a school garden should not be alone in making any decisions, and will need help keeping track of materials, funds, and calling to ask for participation. Acting together, a garden committee can keep the garden program alive.

Often a school garden is started by a parent who has a young child in elementary school. This person may have a lot of enthusiasm and make a unique stamp upon the garden. Before this individual's child leaves for junior high school, the garden committee will need to find a suitable replacement. This is an issue that should be addressed from the moment a school garden is initiated. Unfortunately, many garden programs cease to exist when a Garden Coordinator leaves a school.

Funding to start a school garden is now widely available. In 2006, Assembly Bill 1535 (Nuñez) was passed. The purpose of the funding is to create opportunities for children to learn how to make healthier food choices. This Bill authorizes grants for schools, with funding of \$2,500 available for schools with less than 1,000 children enrolled; and \$5,000 available for schools with a larger population of students.

The California School Garden Network has more information on how to find supplies or funding for your garden. The list can be accessed at www.csqn.org. On the left hand side of the page, click on "Grants and Fundraising."

As the Horticulture Program Representative for Stanislaus County, I'm interested in discovering how many school gardens exist. Please contact me by e-mail aschellman@ucdavis.edu or call 525-6824.