



Factsheet

Growing with families, groups and schools

Whether your community grows on an allotment plot, a community orchard or a community garden the likelihood is that you'll have children on site. If you don't, then engaging families, child-centred groups and local schools is a wonderful way to involve your community and pass on important skills.

Providing a safe, stimulating environment for children alongside some successful, 'grown up' food growing can be done! Children can get bored and stop you working – they can run into trouble with ponds, greenhouses and other plottolders and can trample all over your precious seedlings - or they can look forward to their time down on the plot and become enthusiastic gardeners.

You can create a really practical and easy-to-maintain growing space for fruit and vegetables, attract wildlife, provide a tranquil and harmonious place and combine it with somewhere interactive for children to experience nature with all of their senses. This handout is a brief introduction to making your project child-friendly. It includes discussion of the relevant legislation, outlines good practice and provides suggestions for activities that you can do to enthuse children about nature and growing.



Who can you work with?

Explore the possibilities in your area. These could include:

- local schools
- nurseries
- play schemes and children's centres
- youth groups
- parent and baby groups
- social services
- after school clubs
- sports clubs
- cub/scout and brownie/guide groups
- churches
- childcare providers, etc.

To generate interest you could put on a talk or open day but the individual approach is often the most successful.

Identify a helper, teacher or someone from the Parent and Teacher Association (PTA) who is enthusiastic about growing. Find out what they are already doing and whether they have a green champion or eco-coordinator. A visit to a community project or allotment can build on what they are doing in their own grounds or provide them with greater scope to develop their own project. Make sure that what they will get out of being involved and what you have to offer them is very clear.

For schools, the opportunities for learning are vast. Work with the school to offer something that is linked to the school's own aims (through the curriculum, Eco-Schools, Healthy Schools, etc) and helps deliver real learning outcomes. Activities in the classroom can be linked to those on your project, e.g. growing seedlings in class as part of work on germination and life cycle then transplanting these to your site.



Awareness of where food comes from is at an all time low, with healthy eating and exercise missing from many children's lives. A school allotment plot or involvement with a community garden provides an outside classroom in which any subject, including design, science, maths and language, can be brought alive.

The scope for linking growing activities to the National Curriculum (England, Wales and NI) and the Curriculum for Excellence (Scotland) is extensive. The Growing Schools Programme is an initiative offering a huge range of resources, aimed at supporting teachers to make use of the outdoor classroom. It also delivers hands-on support to schools through its regional hubs. See *Resources*.

Schools are always keen to engage with their communities; offering to visit a school or group to give a talk or advice as part of the programme offered by your project will be greatly appreciated.

If any groups have difficulty getting to your project, ask them to grow plants from seed for you or make seed labels, etc. Then encourage families to visit in their own time to see their children's work in situ.

Offer volunteering opportunities to older children, through the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, enrichment programmes or the school's own community programme. They might be more interested in doing some marketing or website design for you than gardening (at first, anyway). Working with younger children is often a big pull for students thinking of going on to study childcare or teaching, so consider asking if they can help you with primary and early years' groups.

Be prepared

Health and safety

In addition to any appropriate public liability insurance for the site, it is a good idea to have risk assessments in place for specific activities.

If you don't know how to do a Risk Assessment (or it seems a bit daunting) have a look at this five step guide from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). FCFCG have also produced a guide: Health and Safety on community growing sites. See *Resources*. Remember to look at everything from a child's eye view so that you don't miss anything.

Safeguarding

If you are working with under 16 year olds, you should produce a Child Protection Policy. A set of useful guidelines is available from FCFCG (see *Resources*).

Issues to consider include:

- Thorough 'vetting' of all adult helpers. Anybody working with children or vulnerable adults should obtain a Disclosure and Barring Service certificate or PVG certificate in Scotland (see *Resources*).
- Guidelines for appropriate behaviour of adult helpers, including what to do in the case of inappropriate behaviour from others not involved with the children's project.
- What to do if you think a child is being abused or if a child tells you that they are being abused.
- Try to keep all activities with young people as 'public' as possible. To avoid lone adults working with children aim to have two or more adults in the group. Have a clear policy about giving children lifts home.
- Obtain relevant medical information and emergency contact details for the children.
- If working with children under 8 years you may need to register your group with Social Services.
- Be clear with parents/carers about what you can and can't offer in terms of safety and supervision. For example, if offering children's activities at an open day, insist that children are accompanied by an adult unless you are confident that you have the insurance and suitable helpers to offer a crèche facility.
- Have a rule that parents/carers have to give written

permission for their children to take part in the project and make it clear that children need to wear suitable clothing and footwear and may come home muddy.

- Written permissions for photographs to be used publicly will also be needed. You can operate an 'opt out' system that assumes permissions are given unless you are told differently, but this must be made clear.

A child protection policy also serves to protect your adult helpers. You must have a system for dealing with allegations of abuse/mistreatment from the child or a parent/guardian. Any allegation, however unfounded, should be reported to Social Services and the accused helper/worker should stop working on the project until the matter has been resolved. Keep all details confidential and try to avoid public discussion of the case.

Practical considerations

Pay particular attention to shelter, toilets, fitting in with meal times, drinking water, and health and safety. Consider where the children will assemble for 'head counts', eat pack lunches, mill around or listen to instructions.

Be clear that children are the responsibility of their parents or teachers while on site and that no responsibility can be taken for unaccompanied children. However, your site should still be as safe as possible, with care and attention given to the working area and equipment.

Particular issues to consider in relation to younger gardeners include:

- Have a first aid kit available and know where it is.
- Be aware of children with medical conditions and the associated protocol.

- Inspect the site regularly for hazards or contamination and always before a group is due to visit. Remove any hazardous debris (including animal waste) from the plot and fill in potholes.
- Keep a watch for unearthed contaminants during digging activities.
- Deal with any harmful plants as you see appropriate, either by removal, fencing off, labelling or education. Ensure that supervisors are trained in identification and emergency action. It's worth remembering that many common crops have poisonous parts or can cause an allergic reaction (for example: potatoes, parsnip and rhubarb leaves).
- If crops are to be eaten, ensure they can be washed and permissions are given for children to eat new foods.
- Some children attempt to eat soil and vegetation. Extra supervision may be required.
- Teach children to wash their hands thoroughly after gardening. Watch out for thumbs in mouths and nail biters.
- Check tetanus injections are up to date.





- Top canes with old tennis balls, film canisters, wine corks or bike handles to prevent eye damage.
- Keep any chemicals, including fertiliser, labelled and locked away.
- Opt for polycarbonate greenhouses or polytunnels rather than glass.
- Ensure water barrels are covered and that children are supervised around ponds.
- Children must have suitable footwear and clothing; have spare wellies and gloves available and waterproofs and sunhats too, if possible.
- Make sure that tools are of a suitable size and weight, handled safely and are in good working order. They should be stored safely and securely and placed carefully to one side if not in use during a session.
- If livestock is present, hand washing facilities are essential, as is clear signage. A free toolkit is available from FCFCG (see *Resources*).
- It is good practice to ensure that there is minimal disruption to other users on site. Make the boundaries clear. Teenagers or new family groups can sometimes seem

intimidating. You could invite a couple of other project members or allotment holders to talk to the group about different things they grow. This will help break down barriers.

It's all common sense, really!

Making it fun!

Keep everyone busy. Taking turns is part of life but keep any necessary waiting time to a minimum to keep everyone's interest. Splitting children into smaller groups is easier, with groups rotated on several different tasks. Teachers, helpers and parents should all take an active role and support activities.

For families coming along to do their own thing, having some distractions for younger gardeners with limited attention spans can be a great help. By all means put in an expensive play area if you have the funds but there are many ways to create fun and imaginative spaces out of bits and pieces. The more there is for children to do, the more people will bring them to the plot. The children will have someone to play with and the whole social and community aspect of your project increases.

Here are a few tried and tested ideas to inspire you.

Site design and features

Ponds

Water is a fascinating thing. You don't need to have a large wildlife pond – you could create a marsh area or a bog garden (see more below), a shallow pond partially filled with rocks or a mini pond in a barrel with a solar powered fountains.

If you have a pond, it must be securely fenced with a child proof gate and clear lines of sight around it so you can see at a glance if anyone is in there. Ensure it has gradually sloping edges rather than steep sides, which are better for wildlife too. You can get covers for ponds (or make your own with stock fencing), which stops human access but means wildlife can still get in and out. They can be quite unobtrusive, installed just under the water line with plants growing through, but can be costly and make maintenance harder.

If you're considering building a pond on the plot or have one already – have a look at the guidance from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA).

Container gardening

In an area with limited space or with little or no soft ground, containers provide a flexible and surprisingly productive solution. Use hanging baskets, window boxes, pots and planters of different sizes and shapes. Grow herbs, mini vegetables and soft fruit, even climbers and dwarf fruit trees.

The square foot garden

This is a clearly marked and effective way of growing in a

small space. Simply mark out the squares with pegs and string. Give each child their own square and get them to work out how many seeds to plant using the spacing recommendations on the packet.

Raised beds

If you encounter problems like poor soil, bad drainage, awkward access or you are worried about mud being trampled everywhere, build a raised bed. They're perfect for marking out boundaries and allowing easy access for little ones.

The fruit plot

Raspberries, blackcurrants, grapes, gooseberries, tayberries, Japanese wineberries, honeyberries, the list goes on. Plant them along a fence or in a raised bed. Most of them are available in thornless varieties and are less fussy than you think. Children love to browse a fruit plot!

The mini orchard

Fruit trees can be trained to grow flat against a wall, in a pot, or freestanding. Choose a rootstock that will grow to a final size to suit a child's reach. Even a couple together defines an area as something different. Plant four and that's a mini-orchard! For decades they'll provide fruit for eating, juicing, jam making, selling, look beautiful and attract wildlife too.

The kitchen garden

Combine herbs, veg, fruit, trees, flowers to give you everything you need, including a beautiful outdoor space. Grow what you love to eat, but try something new too! Get the children preparing a salad or making soup. Grow edible flowers like day lilies and nasturtiums.

The farm garden

Grow all of the above, plus little blocks of cereal crops such as oats and barley. Keep a few chickens or

ducks. Lots of projects also keep pigs, sheep, goats and cattle: how much room have you got?!

All year growing

Extend the growing season and create an all-weather learning space with a poly tunnel or polycarbonate greenhouse. They come in all sizes. Just a cold frame will help you speed things up in spring and keep it going longer in autumn to fit in with term time.

Sensory gardens

Every garden reaches out through our senses in so many ways. Some have been designed to do this more specifically, with textured paths, gurgling water features, fragrant leaves and flowers, rattling, rustling grasses and seed pods, soft, furry leaves, sweet or sour leaves and berries, spiky seed heads and birdsong.

Herb gardens

Herbs are grown for culinary, medicinal, sensory and cosmetic purposes. Try dedicating your choice of herbs to a specific use, e.g. making soaps or beauty products.

Bog gardens

Bog gardens can be created in very small spaces, even pots (without holes). They provide a home for some very interesting wildlife and very different sorts of plants. Carnivorous bog gardens include plants such as the cobra lily, sundew and butterwort: fantastic names and a great way to teach food chains and adaptation. They are hardy and need little maintenance.

Dry gardens

Illustrate different environments, highlight climate change and don't worry if you forget to water! Mediterranean herbs, ornamental grasses and bamboo are all suitable if you have sandy, gravelly soil or if you create soil like it.

Woodland gardens

From planting a native hedgerow, making more use of existing woodland, adding suitable plants along its borders, even starting one from scratch, it's a valuable conservation action to take and will provide a place for many outdoor activities, including forest school. Many schools don't spot the potential of what they've already got.





Global gardens

Not just a living map of the world, your garden can be used to educate about trade, ecosystems, climate change, global citizenship and can twin your school with others around the world. Build a keyhole garden or hugelkultur to illustrate the global perspective.

Rainbow gardens

Rainbow or spectrum effects can be created with flowers planted in rows of different colours. Create repeating patterns or ribbon borders with seeds, spring bulbs or even vegetables. Plus, eating lots of different coloured fruit and vegetables is a wonderful way of getting your five-a-day.

Wildlife gardens

Many of our wild spaces are under threat here in the UK. Demonstrations of different habitats at your project could result in the creation of one or two of them around school. Nest boxes, insect lodges and hibernation houses are valuable, as are butterfly and bird feeders. Plant native species, leave a patch of nettles or a pile of branches in a corner. Don't remove seed heads from flowers like teasel or sunflowers. Consider a pond (in a securely fenced area) for dipping.

You could even install a hide to give a better chance of seeing your visitors.

Wildflower meadow

Seed mixes are available, but autumn planted plugs will give better results. All you need is a bit of freshly dug land to sow it on, most meadow plants thrive on poor soils so removing the top soil helps. Mini meadow 'pockets' work well. When autumn comes, cut it roughly down and allow the seeds to fall to the ground for next year's growth before raking it over. It's easy, lovely to look at and so beneficial to wildlife. Children can measure rates of growth, species diversity and create artwork in it.

Tranquillity in the garden - prayer, meditation, quiet time

A garden lends itself so well to creating the right ambience for these pursuits. An enclosed area with soft plantings and cool, harmonious colours will have a visible effect on a person's mood. Perhaps add wind chimes or a bird bath.

Gardens for little ones

Under-fives adore gardening; gardens don't always adore under-fives. Use raised beds (keep one just for digging), gate off any areas that need a little more care taken of them, avoid loose substrates and invest in some sturdy children's tools. There are too many fun activities to do with this age group and they are so filled with wonder at it all!

Historical gardens

Plant a garden that is true to a particular era (e.g. Medieval, Tudor, Victorian, Edwardian), movement (French, Dutch, Renaissance, etc) or gardener (Capability Brown, Joseph Paxton, Gertrude Jekyll). Link it to an

event in history and the whole group can plan and discuss their reasons.

Literary gardens

Create a Shakespeare, a Roald Dahl or a fairy tale garden. Look at fictional gardens and characters for inspiration (The Secret Garden, Henny Penny, Tom's Midnight Garden, Alice in Wonderland, The Gruffalo). Create a garden around a poem or write a poem inspired by the garden. Story-telling circles and story walks help make a creative atmosphere. Story-telling events are always a huge hit with families.

Roof gardens

Enclosed roof spaces might be overlooked as potential growing spaces, but some striking gardens have been created up top. Use pots and raised beds made of light materials (a load bearing study is useful) and make sure that it will drain where you want it to!

Micro-gardens

Create a tiny landscape in a seed tray or plant pots of microgreens for children to take away. Much more exciting than cress alone.

Seed tape

If children have trouble with tiny seeds or planting in straight rows, they can make their own seed tape by gluing seeds on to strips of newspaper or kitchen roll with a flour and water mix. Once dry, the tape can be rolled and stored until needed. Great for spelling out words or making patterns too.

Doughnut gardens and lasagne beds

Creating a growing bed without digging is a useful thing and provides an incredibly fertile start for young plants. It's easy to pile up cardboard, straw, manure and compost in layers, then plant into the top layer of compost.

The beds break down over time and provide nutrients and retain moisture: that's a lasagne bed.

A doughnut bed is simply a round version with a feature in the middle (a shrub, tree, water trough, basking stone, ornament, etc).

Get creative

Dens

You can buy or scavenge a shed with a window and smaller children will play house all day, especially if you can get some little chairs and tables, fake food etc and why not have a box of crayons and scrap paper too? Chalks are great for drawing on stones. Hard tempera paint blocks are pretty hassle free.

For older ones you could have a larger shed den which is their space not to be invaded by adults! Or simply provide hazel or willow poles, a small tarp, string and a nice private corner, show them the ropes and leave them to it.

Sticky crowns

Get a piece of cardboard about three inches wide and long enough to fit comfortably round the head. Stick some double sided tape along its length, measure round your kids head and peel off the backing strip, sticking the cardboard into a round hat. Explain that we're going to find some beautiful or special things and make a woodland/nature crown.

You can enhance this activity by using a story beforehand and say the crown is for a special party or picnic. Go on a walk around the area and encourage them to take their time finding special leaves, moss, petals etc rather than grabbing a handful, sticking them on and shouting 'finished'! They get the idea best if you do it too.

Clay play

You may have clay on site, if not it's cheap to buy. This activity can be enhanced by saying you are a Celtic tribe and putting blue stripes of face paint on each other and then handing out a lump of clay and asking them to make a scary face to warn off the other tribe. They smooth the clay on to a tree trunk (might need a drop of water here) to make the face shape – and use grass, leaves, twigs, seeds, moss etc to make features or hair.

You may have sensitive souls who do not aspire to tribal rivalry however, who want to make their face the spirit of the tree, a green man etc. Older ones can adapt this activity to make environmental art: spiralling leaves around a tree stuck on with wet clay in shades of yellow through orange to red.

Seed bombs are another wonderful way to use up clay: mix them with compost and wildflower seeds, then launch them into the wilderness where you would like them to grow. The truly ambitious can also build a cob oven!

Picture frames

Ask them to find four sticks. They make a frame on the ground with the sticks and make pictures

inside with found objects: leaves, twigs, seeds etc.

This can be themed to fit in with an event or lesson or you can leave them to it and let their imagination run wild.

Scavenger hunt

This activity relies on children's innate love of collecting stuff, you just can't stop them! Write a list of what you want them to find, based on what you are likely to have on site and tailor difficulty to age. Give them a bag and the list and off they go.

Possibilities are: something shiny, something hard, three shades of green, something soft, evidence of an animal etc. A variation on this is colour charts from the DIY shop so that they can match up the shades to ones found in nature.

Term time growing

It's so easy to put all that effort in and then have everything crop when there's no one around to pick it. Help schools get it right by choosing early or later varieties, using protected cultivation (fleeces, polytunnels, coldframes,) or harvesting a completely different part of the plant than usual (radish pods, pea shoots, rocket flowers, etc).





Resources

Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens (FCFCG)

Useful resources include Child protection guidelines, Clean Hands Toolkit and Health and Safety on community growing sites.

www.farmgarden.org.uk

Growing Schools

This website has been designed to support teachers in using the 'outdoor classroom' as a resource across the curriculum for pupils of all ages.

www.growingschools.org.uk

The Growing Schools Garden

A virtual garden with case studies from participating schools, factsheets on how to develop areas in your school, video testimonies and a resource library including information on support organisations and places to visit.

www.thegrowingschoolsgarden.org.uk

Garden Organic

Garden Organic is dedicated to researching and promoting

organic gardening, farming and food. Publications, information, training. The Garden Organic for Schools project is a nationwide campaign which helps children grow vegetables at school, and learn more about their food.

www.gardenorganic.org.uk

Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents - pond safety guidance

www.rospa.com/leisuresafety/adviceandinformation/watersafety/pond-dipping.aspx

Royal Horticultural Society

Lots of resources and campaigns including the campaign for school gardening and 'Get your grown ups growing'. www.rhs.org.uk

Farming and Countryside Education

FACE is a registered charity with over 60 member organisations (including FCFCG) which is independent of any political party or movement. It's aim is to educate children and young people about food and farming in a sustainable countryside.

www.face-online.org.uk

Food for Life

The Food for Life Partnership is a network of schools and communities across England committed whose goal is to revolutionise school meals, reconnect young people with where their food comes from and inspire families to cook and grow food.

www.foodforlife.org.uk

Foodshare

Foodshare is a national not-for-profit, volunteer-powered charity which connects growers (schools, allotments, community and kitchen gardeners) with local charities.

www.foodshare.co.uk

Earth Restoration Service (ERS)

The ERS helping children in schools to learn about the environment and to plant trees and create wildflower meadows in order to restore their local degraded habitats.

www.earthrestorationservice.org

Grow your own potatoes

A project that teaches primary aged children about potatoes. Register your school to receive a free potato growing kit and use the supporting lesson plans and worksheets.

<http://gyop.potato.org.uk>

Learning outside the classroom

Provides 'How to' guidance designed to help schools, educational practitioners and other groups (early years and youth groups for example) carry out inspiring and varied LOtC activities.

www.lotc.org.uk

Safeguarding certificate services

Anybody working with children or vulnerable adults should obtain a Disclosure and Barring Service certificate (England, Wales and NI) or PVG certificate (Scotland).

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service

www.disclosurescotland.co.uk