

Growing with schools - inspiration

There are many reasons for a school garden and lots of different designs to suit every objective. It might be that you want to create a really practical and easy-to-maintain growing space for fruit and vegetables, to attract wildlife, provide a tranquil and harmonious place or somewhere interactive for children to experience nature with all of their senses. Here are a few suggestions to get you thinking. Each one can be adapted to any scale or situation and will link in easily to support the curriculum at any level. Why not take a bit here and there from a few?

Container garden

Where space is limited or there is 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 (blueberries thrive in pots), even climbers and dwarf fruit trees.

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!

Veg patch

Dig up the soil and plant some veg! Easy! If you encounter problems like poor soil, bad drainage, awkward access or you are worried about mud being trampled everywhere, build a raised bed. Build three or four to grow different crops (roots in one, beans in another, cabbages in the next and onions in the fourth).

Fruit plot

Raspberries, blackcurrants, grapes, gooseberries, tayberries, Japanese wineberries, the list goes on. Plant them along a fence or in a raised bed. Many are available in thornless varieties and are less fussy than you think.

Orchard

Fruit trees can be trained to grow flat against a wall, in a pot, or freestanding. Choose the final size to suit you. 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.

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.

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 schools 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.

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 singing birds.

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, 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.

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. Research projects on different habitats 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 you a better chance of seeing your visitors.

Wildflower meadow

Seed mixes are available. All you need is a bit of freshly dug land to sow it on. Then let it grow. 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 and species diversity and create artwork in it.

Tranquillity in the garden

Prayers, 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. School gardens should enhance the learning environment in many ways.

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 gravel 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 class 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 as well as a poem inspired by the garden.

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 and make sure that it will drain where you want it to!

Further information

- www.bbc.co.uk
- www.bethchatto.co.uk
- www.easycarnivores.co.uk
- www.eatarainboweveryday.com
- www.edibleplaygrounds.co.uk
- www.edibleschoolyard.org
- www.farmgarden.org.uk
- www.foodforlife.org.uk
- www.gardeningwithchildren.co.uk
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