Now Use It!
Simple Tips to Increase Educational Utilization of School Gardens

Consider Everyone’s attitudes about gardening

Remember that not everyone is interested or excited by gardening or nature. Many school administrators, teachers, volunteers and students, are a bit wary of all that comes with operating and using a school garden.

Administrators
- Hesitate to ask teachers to extend beyond current requirements
- Are uneasy about liabilities caused by the garden
- Do not share the vision of value to students that school garden supporters possess
  - Are unsure of the return on investment of resources, time and effort

Teachers
- Follow the direction of school administrators regarding utilization of classroom time
- Are often nervous about potential dangers such as bees, allergies, pesticides and more
- Have concerns about scheduling issues such as
  - bad weather derailing a planned lesson in the garden
  - Other teachers using the garden when they were intending on using the garden
- As well as covering current curriculum requirements for their class
  - The school garden feels like adding new material to teach students
  - Unsure where to find garden centric lessons
  - Not confident garden curriculum is linked to academic standards
  - Teachers are unsure how to utilize the garden
- Teachers are unsure of the expectations of school garden stakeholders
  - Are they supposed to teach how to garden? Is it their responsibility to have students maintain the garden?
- Have trepidations about class management and student behavior in the garden-classroom
  - And concerned about lost time moving classes in and out of the garden

Volunteers
- Are often non-gardeners apprehensive about their ability to assist with gardening activities
- Do not have positive life-experiences in nature
- Can’t envision how the garden will enhance their child’s learning

Students
- Usually have no prior experience learning in an outdoor environment
  - Outdoor time at school is comprised of recess
- Sometimes have hidden concerns such as bees, getting dirty, unknown expectations
- Have difficulty behaving in a less structured environment
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Establish a garden committee
● This committee should be made up of:
  o Parents, individuals knowledgeable in gardening
  o Actively interested teacher(s), cafeteria worker(s), nurse(s), maintenance personal
  o Local garden club members, community garden gardeners or Master Gardener
  o Highly interested students, possibly members of a garden club

Continually supply school administration and teachers with current academic studies on the value of utilization of school gardens in student learning
● Provide academic articles only from universities and the like (.edu)
  o No blogs, new age materials or folksy information

Make expectations for the garden clear
● Are the teachers supposed to maintain the garden? Are lessons to be about gardening?

Know your numbers
● Maintain a diary at the garden for teachers and others using the school garden
  o Keep it simple; teacher, subject, amount of time

Know your specific school gardens’ obstacles
● Survey your school garden stake holders
  o A reward, such as a free packet of seeds or a cookie, will increase responses

Form a pyramid of obstacles
● Keep the focus of your garden committee on resolving biggest issues first

Make the garden a conducive space for teaching
● Have seating
  o In the shade
● Remind teachers that garden material can be brought to the indoor classroom
● Make/maintain a master schedule for class time in the garden

Have all the materials students will need at the garden
● Assemble:
  o A small table for the teacher for demonstrations, class materials
  o Drawing boards or work surface for kids
  o Pencils, sharpeners, erasers, paper

Have an emergency medical plan for the garden
● Often the same as recess plan

With the input of teachers; assemble a “garden classroom suggested management plan”
● Outlining expected behavior:
  o Moving out into the garden
Arriving at “anchor” point
Moving back into the classroom

With the input of teachers; assemble specific curriculum lesson plans/ideas
- Provide available lesson plans
- And ideas on how a teacher might use garden material to teach established lessons

Provide teacher assistants while teaching in the garden
- Hiring a garden facilitator
- Or assembling a team of teacher assistants for the garden

Resources

- Educators’ Perceptions Associated with School Garden Programs in Clark County, Nevada: Practices, Resources, Benefits and Barriers
- Tomomi Murakami, Jennifer Pharr, Timothy Bungum
  Department of Environmental and Occupational Health, School of Community Health Sciences,
  University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 4505 S. Maryland Parkway, Las Vegas, NV 89154, USA
- Portland (Oregon) School Garden Assessment; December, 2016
- Growing Gardens (Anna Garwood, Pesha Wasserstrom, Scott Logan and Stephanie Steeves)
- Massachusetts School Garden Start-Up Workbook, https://www.aginclassroom.org,
  https://www.slideshare.net University of Georgia