

Establishing a School or Community Garden

- Engage your community
- Identify resources
- Choose a site
- Design the garden
- Get Growing
- The Garden: A Wellness Site and Learning Laboratory
- Food from School Gardens as an Approved Source for School Meals

Engage your Community

Community Gardens

- Begin by bringing people and different organizations together to learn which issues are important to your community.
- Discuss how a community garden – whether a communal space or individual plots – could serve the needs of the community.
- If a community garden will benefit the community, build on this momentum by holding regular meetings to collaborate on ideas and goals.
- Develop a plan of action. Get people energized and organized.

School Gardens

Establish Support at the school.

- Consult with school administrators.
- Talk to Parent Teacher Organization and/or School Health Advisory Committee. Create a vision for the garden. Will it be used for all grade levels as an outdoor learning environment for academic curriculum? Will it be part of the normal after-school programming? Will the school establish a gardening club?
- If planning to eventually use foods grown in the school garden in school food services, consult with the School Food Service manager.
 - Refer to the School Garden Guidelines.
 - Contact Maricopa County Cooperative Extension regarding School Garden Food Safety Training (grant from Arizona Department of Agriculture).
- Decide who is going to be in charge of the garden.
- Designate a person/group to maintain a schedule of chores and events in the garden.

Identify resources

Community and School Gardens

Forming local partnerships is an excellent way to leverage resources and gain access to needed materials, tools, funding, volunteers, and technical assistance. USDA's People's Garden website has ho-to videos and databases filled with garden-based learning curricula, free seed and funding sources, and healthy gardening practices. You can call on an Extension Master Gardener volunteer in your area to help with gardening challenges. The long-term success of your community garden will depend a great deal on relationships with partners.

Some other resources include:

- Arizona Master Gardener Program: contact the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension Office in your county.
- Arizona Department of Education School Garden Program
- American Community Garden Association www.communitygarden.org

Choose a site

Community Gardens

Across the country, community gardens are becoming an anchor for neighborhood revitalization. Community gardens range in purpose from increasing access to fresh, healthy food in rural towns to providing safe green spaces where people can gather and youth can play in urban areas. What type of community garden will your neighborhood be planting? Knowing this information will narrow your search for a site. If growing food, find a location that receives at least six hours of direct sunlight per day with easy access to water. Check if the land you would be growing on has proper drainage. Once you identify an ideal site, find out who owns the land. Contact the landowner and discuss next steps which may include obtaining permission through written agreement or lease and getting liability insurance.

- An ideal location will be one where people gather for other activities on a regular basis. Some examples include senior or community centers, libraries, and public parks.

School Gardens

Finding the best location for your garden project will require some investigation. Tarmac, dry earth, mud, and empty fields can be turned into green grounds, outdoor laboratories, vegetable plots, herb gardens, play spaces and study areas. Use these questions to guide your thinking, and then decide on the garden location accordingly.

- Is the site easy and safe for both students and teachers to access?
- Is there a nearby and dependable water source?
- Is the site protected from vandals, rodents or other potential threats?
- Is the area big enough to allow for future growth?
- Is the site exposed to sunlight *at least* 6 hours a day, if planting flowers, herbs and vegetables?
- Is the soil contaminated with lead or other heavy metals?

Parking lots, courtyards, rooftops, greenhouses, and schoolyards can all be potential sites. If it is not possible to have a garden at the school, consider options within the community like city parks or vacant lots, places of worship, nature centers, retirement centers, and community gardens. You will want to avoid locations that are exposed to nearby pollutants like highways, airports, industry smokestacks, or areas referred to as **brownfields**. If space is very limited, consider gardening in containers. You might even find that the ideal spot is indoors instead of outside.

Garden Healthy

Community and School Gardens

Before you start planting, it is important to research the history and past uses of your chosen site. Once the past uses have been determined, take samples of the soil and have them analyzed to find out soil type and quality. EPA has [step-by-step guidelines](#) on how to do this. Consult with your state environmental agency, local health department, or county's [Cooperative Extension office](#) to learn how to take a soil sample and to determine what kinds of samples you should take. The quality of the soil can have an effect on the design of your garden.

- Determine history and past uses of site
- Soil test

- Safety - You will need to determine that the soil where you will garden is free of harmful lead. You can pay to have the soil tested, or you may contact the Arizona Department of Health Services and utilize their laboratory for testing. It's free. Contact Allison Paris-Giles at allison.giles@azdhs.gov or 602-542-0389.
- Quality – your garden will be much more successful if you know your soil well before you begin. There are simple ways to determine the type of soil that fills your garden. You can find fun activities for testing your soil composition online, and they only involve water and the soil from your garden. Most soils in Arizona benefit from the addition of organic material, which can easily be accomplished by the addition of commercial compost. Compost has the added benefit of being a great fertilizer for your plants.
- Follow the School Garden Guidelines created by the Arizona Department of Health Services and the Arizona Department of Education.

Design Your Garden

Community and School Gardens

Engage all of your partners when designing the garden.

Consider its purpose when designing.

- Age-appropriate
- Accessible
- Includes places to sit and enjoy the garden or engage in learning activities.
- Receives an appropriate amount of sunlight (location of garden in relation to shade structures and buildings will influence this).

Get Growing

Community and School Gardens

Choose a palette of plants that are safe (no poisonous fruits, large thorns or weak limbs), healthy (resistant to disease or pests), low maintenance, desirable in size and shape, and suitable to your climate. Selecting appropriate plants requires knowledge of what plants will survive and grow in your region of Arizona. Your local Extension Office will be able to provide a planting calendar that shows which plants do best in which regions, and when to plant them.

The Garden: A Wellness Site and Learning Laboratory

Link your nutrition and physical activity messages to garden activities. In school gardens, work with school staff to plan activities that align with Arizona Academic Standards. Incorporate nutrition messages into science, math, and language lessons by conducting them in the garden.

Don't forget to share the message that SNAP benefits may be used to purchase food bearing seeds and plants for home gardening. SNAP Garden posters are available through ADHS to promote this healthy initiative.

Food from School Gardens as an Approved Source for School Meals

If you are working to get a school garden started or have an existing school garden and the school is considering incorporating the foods grown in the garden into its meal services, here are your points of contact:

- For Food Safety in School Gardens training: contact Monica Pastor, Associate Area Agent, University of Arizona College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Maricopa Cooperative Extension at 602-827-8200 ext, 3217. Classes will be conducted regionally throughout the state starting in March 2013. Funding is made possible through the School Garden Grant awarded by the Arizona Department of Agriculture. Classes are based on the concepts of Good Handling Practices/Good Agricultural Practices (GHP/GAP) that were designed for farmers who grow food for consumers.
- After completion of the Food Safety in School Gardens training, or for existing gardens that are already implementing safe gardening practices, contact Kathryn Mathewson, School Garden Sanitarian and Health Educator, Arizona Department of Health Services at 602-364-3952. As appropriate, she will visit and inspect the garden site. After inspection, if growing and food handling practices are deemed to be acceptable by the Sanitarian, the school garden will receive a certificate. The certificate may be used as part of the process of applying to use foods grown in the school garden as an approved source for school meal service.

For assistance with general resources for gardening in Arizona, curriculum questions, and SNAP Ed related questions around school and community gardens, contact Allison Parisi-Giles at allison.giles@azdhs.gov or 602-542-0389.

Many of the items in this handout were taken from the Let's Move initiative. Please visit www.letsmove.org for more information.