



ARKANSAS
Farm to School

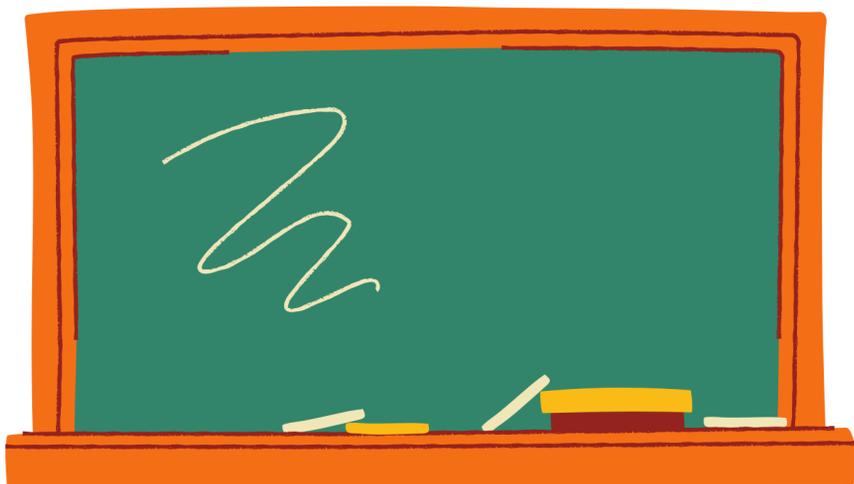
School Garden Committees

If you want to start a garden program at your school, the best place to start is by forming a school garden committee. School gardens take a lot of planning and hard work, so it's important to enlist a team to help your program succeed. Pooling resources, ideas, and labor will help ensure that your garden will continue growing for many years to come!

For additional help and support in school garden development, contact Erica Benoit, State School Garden Manager at the Arkansas Department of Agriculture, erica.benoit@agriculture.arkansas.gov, (501) 295-8856.



Gather Interest



Start by building your network and reaching out to potential supporters for an initial brainstorming meeting. Send emails to the school community, post fliers, and talk to the school administration. School administration can help find resources and funding, coordinate with teachers, and promote the garden program in general.

If possible, invite the principal, school board members, superintendent, or other administrators to participate in the committee. In addition to school administration, consider involving the following people in the garden committee:

- Teachers/Educators
- Maintenance staff
- Food service staff
- Family members
- Students
- Farmers/Master Gardeners
- County Extension Agents
- Community members

Hold an initial interest meeting (in-person or virtual), to present a vision for the school garden, what the committee's role will be, and create a list of people interested in joining.

Develop the Committee

The recommended size of the garden committee is 6 to 12 people to form a diverse membership group. Diversity in stakeholders will help pull in more resources and ensure the sustainability of the garden. Members should commit to participating for a specific length of time, such as one semester or school year. New members can, and should, be regularly recruited.

Committees can decide if they want to assign specific roles or assign responsibilities on a case-by-case basis. For example, one to two people can be assigned committee leaders, whose duties it would be to organize and lead meetings, delegate responsibilities, follow up to ensure that responsibilities are met, and more. Other potential roles could include treasurer, secretary, etc.

Once you've gathered and organized your team, figure out when, and how often, the committee will meet. It's important to set regular meetings. In addition, maintain a consistent means of communication such as email, a group message, or a Facebook group.

Set Goals

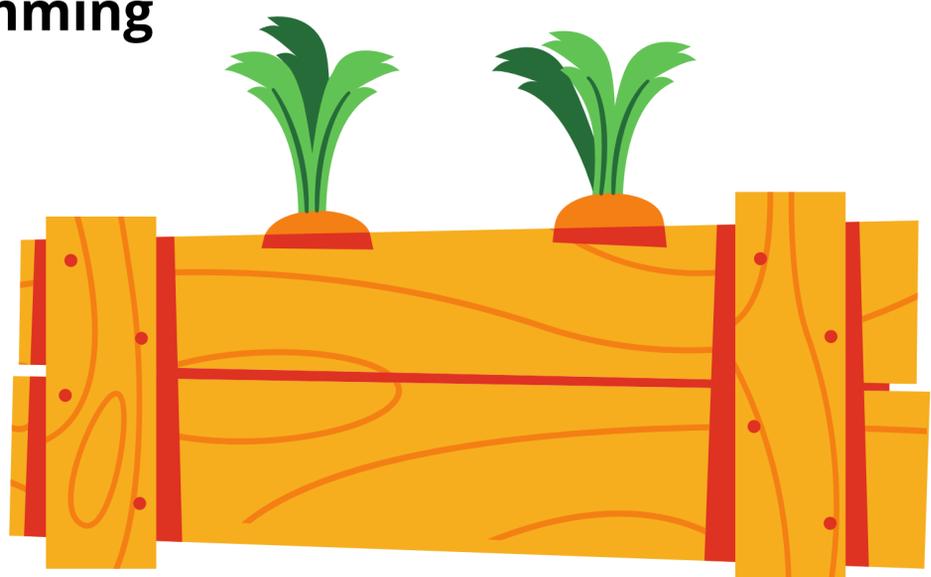
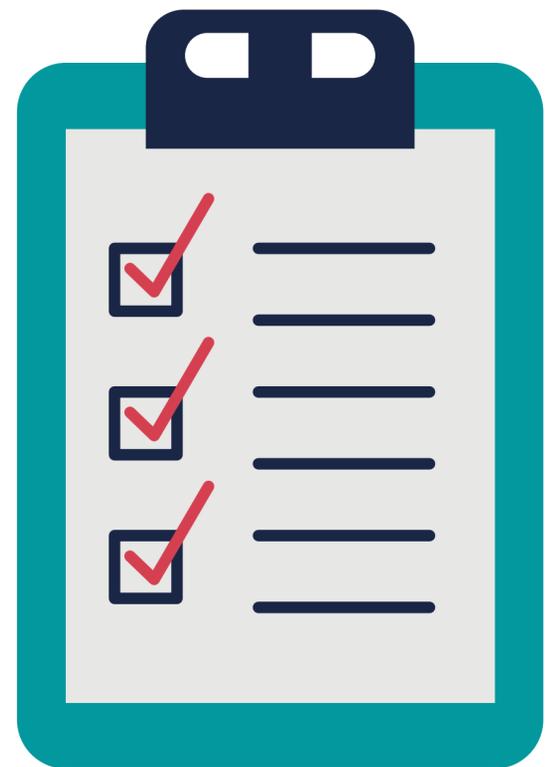
If you're starting a school garden from the ground up, the first item on the committee agenda should be to plan the garden design and installation and to establish a plan for ongoing garden maintenance, including during the summer. An essential part of the school garden is, of course, students. Involve students in decision-making and gardening tasks.

The second item on the to-do list is to address how the school garden and programming will be funded. Is there funding available from the school budget? What about fundraisers? Would the committee like to write a grant? [Follow this link for a list of school garden grants available.](#)

Launch Activities and Programming

School gardens support farm to school activities in the classroom, cafeteria, and with the community.

In the classroom, either inside or outside, identify how the garden will create opportunities for learning on the topics of agriculture, nutrition, and environmental education.





Brainstorm speakers who would come in to present on special topics like beekeeping or compost. Not only can the garden support lessons and learning in science, but also art, math, language arts, social studies, and more. Work with school administration and curriculum specialists to link the school garden to Arkansas state standards

In the cafeteria, fruits and vegetables grown in the garden can be used in school meals. If students are involved in the growing of food, they are more likely to eat those foods when they appear on their lunch tray, providing an incredible opportunity to increase participation in school meal programs and increase students' consumption of nutritional foods. In addition to serving garden fruits and veggies in the cafeteria, they can also be served in smaller portions through taste tests or snacks. Taste tests are an innovative way for the school nutrition staff to try out a new recipe or new food to gauge the interest of the students before adding it permanently to the school menu.

To involve the community and share the burden of garden maintenance, incorporate volunteers from the school and greater community into the garden through events such as workdays, open houses, or even garden parties. Think about nearby field trip opportunities with local businesses and farms. Additionally, continue engaging the school community and beyond by communicating garden happenings through social media, school newsletters, and other avenues.

Happy Gardening!

School gardens are fantastic opportunities for students to discover where food comes from and engage in hands-on learning across a variety of disciplines. Building a diverse, dedicated team to collaborate in goal-setting, coordinate your program, and share the hard work is an essential part of starting and sustaining a school garden program. Once you've assembled your school garden committee, you've taken the first step toward ensuring your garden will benefit students long into the future.



For more information, and to sign up for the bi-weekly newsletter visit arfarmtoschool.org.

