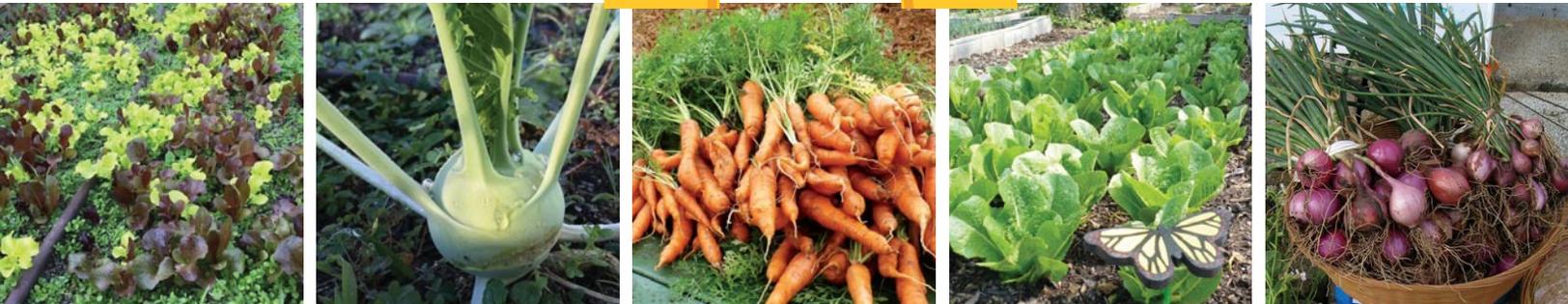


# SCHOOL GARDENS

*Taking Root in Wake County*



The Dirt on Planning and Growing Edible School Gardens at WCPSS





# SCHOOL GARDENS

## Taking Root in Wake County

Edible school gardens bring learning to life for students! Gardens enable teachers to incorporate experimental learning into the curriculum across all subject areas, and they help students explore connections between education, food and health. Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) supports edible gardens and provides resources for schools starting and managing school gardens at [wcpssgardens.weebly.com](http://wcpssgardens.weebly.com).

Research shows that edible school gardens:

- significantly increase science achievement scores
- have a positive impact on behavior
- increase interest in eating fruits and vegetables
- increase knowledge about nutritional benefits of fruits and vegetables
- improve social skills
- improve life skills

### STEP 1

#### Form a Planning Committee

The first step in starting an edible school garden is to investigate interest among administrators, teachers, parents and students. Form a planning committee of

dedicated people with the skills, knowledge and interest in making the garden a reality.

### STEP 2

#### Define a Purpose, Objectives & Values

Determine the goals of your garden during the planning process; use the WCPSS School Garden Goals below, or develop your own.

- To support NC State Standards, inquiry and the 4 Cs
- To encourage healthy eating and exercise
- To combat food insecurity in our schools and communities by donating produce and educating to support home gardening
- To build eco-literacy and connections with nature
- To create connections to and an appreciation for agriculture
- To teach sustainable agricultural practices, including water and soil conservation
- To teach food safety from seed to table

### STEP 3

#### Create a Plan

Your plan should encompass everything from where the garden might be, to the approvals process, from funding to garden rules.

**Where to grow? How to design the garden?** Your planning should address the garden site(s), growing cycles, maintenance and safety. Consider whether you will plant in the ground, raised beds, planter boxes, in containers or in a combination of these ways. When choosing your garden site, consider:

- ADA accessibility
- 6-8 hours of sunlight
- nearby water source

Contact WCPSS Environment and Grounds Department and Extension Master Gardeners volunteers ([mgardener@wakegov.com](mailto:mgardener@wakegov.com) or 919-250-1084) for help in this phase of your planning.

Then check your possible garden location(s) to ensure it does not infringe on dedicated easements, right-of-ways, buffers, tree save areas, spaces reserved for future expansion, setbacks or buffers. You may contact landscape architect Alice Reese with CLH Design ([areese@clhdesignpa.com](mailto:areese@clhdesignpa.com)), who is volunteering to provide this technical assistance; allow two weeks for a reply.

**When are we gardening?** Think about your school calendar and whether you will grow year-round or from September-May. Consider holidays and summer break; traditional calendar schools can maintain gardens year-round when they involve families/the community and make it part of their plan.

**Who maintains the garden?** Your school will be responsible for maintaining the garden. WCPSS Environmental & Grounds staff will *not* build, water, weed, mulch, or otherwise maintain the garden. This includes the removal of the garden if it is no longer being used. Develop a plan for watering on weekends, holidays and breaks as needed.

**How do we get approval from WCPSS?** If your principal has approved edible gardening and you have verified the garden location is feasible, submit a Facilities Modification Request form ([www.wcpss.net/Page/255](http://www.wcpss.net/Page/255)) to WCPSS to get final approval of your garden location. The form must be submitted at least 60 days prior to the planned start of your garden. After submitting the form, you will be asked to send supporting documents:

- A site plan showing the garden location and shed location
- A sketch of the garden layout (include type of garden, ie edible garden, raised beds, in-ground, wall garden, hanging garden, etc.)
- Details regarding the materials to be used to construct the garden (wood, cinder block, brick, etc.)
- Ground cover you plan to use under raised beds and around the education garden
- Types of plants to be planted in the garden

After receiving WCPSS Facilities approval:

- Complete a soil test ([www.ncagr.gov/agronomi/uyrst.htm](http://www.ncagr.gov/agronomi/uyrst.htm))
- Prior to digging at the garden site, your school must hire a private contractor to come to the school to mark all utilities and contact the 811 service to mark public lines.

**How do we fund the garden?** Your school or PTA will need to fund the garden through its budget, local or national grants and/or donations; plan accordingly. Consider all materials and activities needed to build and maintain the garden— construction, seeds, transplants, educational materials, tools, equipment, organic materials, fertilizer, etc.

If schools wish to apply for grant funding, they must first contact the WCPSS Office of Grants, 919-431-7207 or fill out an intent to apply form. *PTAs do not need to contact WCPSS Office of Grants, unless the school is planning to use some of their school funds to match with PTA funds.* Note that whether the school or the PTA is applying for funds, schools need to receive approval from Facilities, through the Facilities Modification Request process, for starting a garden before applying for a grant or building the garden.

Welcome your community in supporting the garden; local business and civic organizations often support school gardens with a variety of in-kind donations of materials and services. Recruit them to sponsor the garden – even if it’s just a section or row. Consider what you need the most (such as equipment or money) and don’t be afraid to ask for it.

**What are our garden rules?** It is crucial that the safety and well-being of students, teachers, volunteers and everyone involved is always top of mind. Create garden rules to post in order to protect those working in the garden, the plants and produce. Consider the following safety guidelines when creating your plan.

## Safety and the Garden

Remember safety first and follow these garden rules:

- Place a secured fence around the garden. (This is a best practice, but not a requirement.)
- Store tools and supplies in a shed—do not allow children in the shed. (All sheds must be approved through the Facilities Modification Request process and permitted through the Wake County Permitting office.)
- Use child-sized tools – teach correct use.
- Use organic practices.

- Wash hands or use hand sanitizer before and after gardening.
- Wear gardening gloves to work in the garden.
- Use only potable water to water fruits and veggies.
- Do not use animal manure in the vegetable garden.
- Compost correctly at the correct the temperature.
- Harvest using disposable plastic food service gloves.
- Do not eat in the garden.
- Place harvested fruits and veggies in sanitized containers, buckets, or bags (food storage bags).
- Wash all produce under running water before eating.
- Refrigerate produce.
- No running in the garden.

More detailed information about school garden food safety can be found online in **Food Safety for School + Community Gardens – A Handbook for Beginning and Veteran Garden Organizers**, published by NC State University and NC Cooperative Extension.

### STEP 4

## Organize the Garden & Activities

Know your objectives from the get-go. This will help with overall planning and when coordinating activities and lesson plans. Also remember that it's important to assign work tasks to group members and allocate space in the garden appropriately.

#### Lessons/Curriculum Resources:

- WCPSS Edible School Gardens ([wcpssgardens.weebly.com](http://wcpssgardens.weebly.com))
- Collective School Garden Network
- The Edible Schoolyard
- 4-H in Wake County
- Life Lab
- NC Ag in the Classroom
- Poe Center for Health Education

### STEP 5

## Stick to the Plan, Grow and Learn!

Register your edible school garden at the **WCPSS Edible Garden Registry:** [tinyurl.com/WCPSSGardenRegistry](http://tinyurl.com/WCPSSGardenRegistry)

Having your plan in place will allow your garden to thrive. Involve students at all grade levels in planning, planting and harvesting the garden. Invite staff, students and community members to volunteer work days. Consider forming a before- or after-school garden club for even more benefits and engagement. Incorporate garden harvests into classroom and school celebrations and events. Research and visit other school gardens to get ideas for how to improve your garden; check the Edible Garden Registry to locate a garden near you.



# SCHOOL GARDEN Q & A

## > Can we eat foods we grow in our school garden?

Yes! Teachers, students and volunteers may eat the fruits, vegetables and herbs from the garden in the classroom and incorporate them into classroom learning and celebrations.

## > Can our cafeteria serve foods from our garden?

No. All produce served on the serving line in the cafeteria must be Good Agricultural Practices-certified and grown by an approved NC Farm to School farmer working with WCPSS Child Nutrition Services.

## > Can we donate foods we grow in the garden?

Yes! Schools may donate produce to school pantries, backpack programs and holiday meal boxes, and/or to community partners who distribute fresh produce to those in need. Your school may wish to sign on to Plant a Row for the Hungry. Visit [foodshuttle.org](http://foodshuttle.org) to learn more.

## > Will WCPSS help build garden beds or maintain our gardens?

No. Your school will be responsible for funding and maintaining your garden, including building, soil amendments, mulching, watering, weeding, etc.

## > Does WCPSS provide tools for school gardens?

No. Your school must provide its own tools. Families, staff, local garden centers and businesses may donate gently used or new tools, or your school may purchase gardening tools.

## > Can we plant in containers, raised beds, planter boxes and directly in the soil?

Yes! If you plant in containers, boxes and rolling raised beds that are housed on an existing concrete pad of some kind, you do not need to contact WCPSS Facilities. If you are building raised beds or boxes that will be stationary or planting directly into the ground at your school, you will need WCPSS approval through the Facilities Modification Request process.

## References & Resources

### > WCPSS Edible School Garden Resource Site

A resource provided by WCPSS Central Office to help schools plan and organize outdoor learning centers for the successful curricular implementation of school gardens. [wcpssgardens.weebly.com](http://wcpssgardens.weebly.com)

### > Advocates for Health in Action (AHA)

Materials on starting and maintaining school gardens, including resources from AHA's Dig In! and other sources. [www.advocatesforhealthinaction.org/fuel-your-school](http://www.advocatesforhealthinaction.org/fuel-your-school)

### > Grow For It

This NC 4H program provides resources to connect youth and educators to agriculture. [www.growforit.org](http://www.growforit.org)

### > The Grow Zone –

#### Willow Springs Elementary School Garden

Great information on curriculum, funding, sources and gardening ideas. [wsesgarden.webs.com](http://wsesgarden.webs.com)

### > NC Ag in the Classroom

Resources, lesson plans, grant opportunities and more for NC teachers. [ncagintheclassroom.com](http://ncagintheclassroom.com)

### > Growing Minds

Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project resources for teachers. [growing-minds.org](http://growing-minds.org)

### > Kids Gardening

Lesson plans, ideas, grants and more. [www.kidsgardening.org](http://www.kidsgardening.org)

### > Durham Public Schools Hub Farm

On-site programming for grades K-12 at this 30-acre farm, woodland and aquatic habitat and food farm. [www.thehubfarm.org](http://www.thehubfarm.org)

### > NC Botanical Garden

On-site educational programming for school groups and training for teachers. [ncbg.unc.edu](http://ncbg.unc.edu)

### > National Farm to School Network

School garden resources available. [farmtoschool.org](http://farmtoschool.org)



Advocates for Health in Action (AHA) improves the health and well-being of Wake County residents by facilitating and supporting community initiatives. We accomplish this by convening partners that change policies, systems and environments focused on well-being, healthy eating and physical activity.

This resource was prepared in partnership with Wake County Public School System staff.

[www.AdvocatesforHealthinAction.org](http://www.AdvocatesforHealthinAction.org)

