



Guide to Starting a School Garden Club

Facilitation Guide



Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Garden Club Timelines	3
Pre-Garden Club: Communication & Collaboration	3
SWOT Analysis	4
Recruitment	5
During Garden Club: Engagement Strategies	7
Well-being in the Garden	10
Methods of Gardening	11
Securing Funding	12
Post-Garden Club: Program Sustainability	13
Garden Club Succession Planning	15
Garden Club Resources	16
Checklist	17
Garden Journal Template	18

Click on our *flork* icon to
come back to this page!



Introduction

This Guide to Starting a School Garden Club is designed to help an educator or extra-curricular facilitator get started with a school-wide garden club at an Elementary school (ages 5 to 12) or Junior High school (13 to 16).

Garden Club Objectives

- Youth dip into their creativity with this workshop that explores some tasty homemade dips and spreads with local vegetables and sides.
- Youth learn to create their own recipe to take home so they can spread the word!

Garden Club Goals

- Creating space in schools for all students to have the chance to participate in gardening.
- Explore new and different foods and flavours through the cooking and tasting process.

This guide was inspired by the work done in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, at the Woodlawn Family of schools (specifically Admiral Westphal Elementary and Caledonia Junior High) by Schools Plus staff and collaborating teachers in the 2024-2025 school year. The work was made possible by grant money provided by Nourish Nova Scotia to jump-start our projects and purchase supplies to start a garden club at schools that have little to no outdoor or indoor garden space or equipment.

Developed by Erik Garf
Child and Youth Care
Practitioner

In Consultation with Jess Ross
School Community Gardens
Project Lead

First Edition Created Jan 2025
Pilot Program Administered
2024-25 School Year



Garden Club Timelines

Pre-Garden Club

During Garden Club

Post Garden Club

Pre-Garden Club

Communication & Collaboration

Establishing Partnerships and Awareness

It is important before starting a Garden Club to communicate all your plans with administrative staff, supervisors, and other educators in the building. You will be surprised who will be supportive and want to help out with Gardening projects. Build a team of educators who are interested and passionate about gardening and who can support the creation of this club.

Who Could Be Involved

School Principal: Arguably the most important person to collaborate with, the principal needs to approve any new programming happening in the school and will let you know if there is any funding in finances that can be contributed to the starting of a garden club.

Caretaker/Custodian: This staff member may have information about gardening equipment in storage and will know more about the process of using the school grounds for gardening.

School Counsellor: This educator will have an understanding of how important gardening is for well-being and may be able to identify students who will benefit most from garden time.

Classroom Teachers: Classroom teachers may be interested in collaborating on a school garden club, especially if they want to get one set up for classroom science and nature projects.



Art Specialist: This educator will have curriculum ideas on how to incorporate science, nature, and art into the garden club programming, and assist in beautifying your garden space.

Community Organizations: This space is often full of great resources and references to help develop programming and create gardening opportunities with adaptations and accessibility.

Child and Youth Care Practitioners: These specialists will have a good understanding of the whole school community and will be able to help recruit students for the club and help facilitate programming.

Learning Centre: This space is often full of great resources and references to help develop programming and create gardening opportunities with adaptations and accessibility.

At team meetings, classroom visits, or prep times, let other staff members know you are thinking of starting a garden club, and see who is interested in collaborating.

SWOT Analysis

Evaluating the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.

Assess the needs and barriers at your school to ensure that you can sustainably run a garden program. This is a review and assessment method used in design thinking and entrepreneurship to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of an idea.

Every school is different and will face its own unique challenges and successes. Review the example SWOT analysis below to see what applies to your school environment and create your own SWOT analysis based on your understanding of your school community and how a garden club could benefit the well-being of your students.

Things to consider for your SWOT Analysis

- Funding
- Staffing
- Student engagement
- Program space (indoor & outdoor)
- Collaborations & partnerships



Example SWOT Analysis

Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students engage with nature and science education recreationally.• Transferable skills to home gardening.• Beautifying the school grounds.• Students feel a sense of ownership and leadership in growing plants.	Weaknesses <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Schools lack garden infrastructure.• Student and teacher schedules.• Capacity of staff is limited.• Lack of interest from students due to limited experience with gardening.• Funding may be difficult to maintain.
Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Addressing food insecurity.• Learning about food systems.• Chance to incorporate food literacy.• Collaborating with local organizations.• Multi-disciplinary projects such as art, cooking, business, and drama.	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Potential of outdoor gardens to be vandalized by the public.• Distract students from completing their school work.• Attract animals and insects.• Plants may not grow successfully.

Recruitment

Building the Group, Gaining Interest, Growing Community.

There are many different ways to get students involved in gardening, and some will work better at your school depending on its size, infrastructure, capacity, and needs. There are many ways to include the whole school in gardening, such as putting a hydroponics grower in every classroom, but gardening programming is strengthened if you start small and facilitate activities in small groups of students who are passionate about gardening.

Elementary students are more often willing to engage in new programming without too much incentive, whereas Junior High students sometimes need encouragement to participate and try something new. Below are some strategies for recruiting students for a garden club. Be cautious not to overextend and take on a group size that is difficult to manage.



Recruitment Strategies

Find the Green Thumbs: Ask teachers if there are any students in their class who have expressed interest in gardening. Invite these 'green thumb' students and encourage them to invite a few friends from their class to join.

Poster Around the School: Put up posters around the school to spread the word about your gardening club. Design your own poster or make it an activity and have the students design it. Include information such as when, where, and how often the club will meet, and if there is a specific target demographic (e.g., Grade 3 students).

Creating a Safe Space: As a garden club facilitator, it is important to accept students who may be looking for a safe place to be with a group of friends or supportive adults and participate for the well-being benefit, social or emotional support, or to avoid external situations and conflicts. Having access to snacks may be another reason students join. If this need arises in your club, this could be a great opportunity to include Food Literacy into your programming.

Classroom Presentation: Ask permission of a classroom teacher if you can host a presentation on 'joining the school garden club'. This is a great chance to establish expectations and to promote program projects. Have students enroll on a sign-up sheet, or provide information on the next club meeting.

This can also be a chance for garden club students from older grades to visit younger grades and show the gardening work that they have been doing. This has been one of the best ways to grow awareness of the garden club and to learn about gardening through peer teaching. These presentations can be completely student-led.

Example student presentations

- How to use a hydroponics device demonstration.
- How to properly water and care for a plant.
- Basic plant biology science lesson.



During Garden Club

Implementation

Planning Projects and Promoting Engagement

It is important to come up with a plan to help guide your work and make sure the club has activities or tasks to do weekly, bi-weekly or monthly. If you are looking for detailed lesson plans and how to tie in curriculum to a garden program, check out the **Grow Eat Learn Resource Hub**. The following section will help you to strategically engage your school in your gardening program.

Plan Ahead!

Plan a few weeks in advance to boost youth engagement or have a larger project that you work towards.

For example: end every session with letting the group know what the next session will be about.

Engagement Strategies

1 Reward Programs

Use 'garden time' as reward time for students who require adaptation in their school schedules. You can schedule a student's daily garden engagement as a pathway to classroom participation (See example 1.1). Watering the garden or tending to the plants can be a great break for students who struggle to focus for long periods.

1.1 Example - Garden Schedule

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Before recess	Garden Visit				Garden Visit
After recess		Garden Visit		Garden Visit	
Before lunch					
After lunch			Garden Visit		

Important Note: Do not remove gardening time or cancel programming due to behaviour, rather, encourage positive behaviour by rewarding extra time in the gardening environment if the student is following expectations.



2 Student-Led Maintenance

Assign weekly garden maintenance and care for the garden club's growing projects to students (See example 2.1). This can help sustain the program and alleviate some of the work from the facilitators. Ensure the students understand their job, how to do it, and when to do it. A garden club is operating at its best when it is mostly student-led.

2.1 Example - Garden Upkeep Plan

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Student 1		Trim	Weed	Water	Trim
Student 2		Water	Trim	Weed	Water
Student 3		Weed	Water	Trim	Weed

Tip for Success

There will likely be occasions when nobody is on school grounds to care for the plants, such as March Break or Winter Holiday. These breaks can be an opportunity for garden club students to take home a plant to care for and return afterwards. Summer is more of a challenge, but some volunteers may be willing to tend to the garden weekly if they live in the community, or SchoolsPlus staff may be on-site.

3 Growing Journals

As plants grow they change shape, color, appearance, and more! A gardening journal is a great way for students to maintain their engagement with the garden through literacy and arts. Give each student a journal (See template on page 18) to record their plant research in. As the plants grow they can record their growth in their journals by writing a sentence of observation and drawing. Check out the [Grow Eat Learn Garden Lessons](#) for more Garden Journal Prompts.



4 Classroom Competitions

If you can organize a school-wide gardening project, you may notice some competitive spirit arise from the students and teachers. Embrace the competition to maintain and boost school engagement in gardening.

Competitions like these can be a great way to get buy-in and increase student participation, but it can also cause conflict and diminish confidence in gardening. When setting up an outdoor garden, we found success in not separating the garden beds by classrooms, but rather making it one full garden project that the whole school interacts with.



Embrace competition to boost engagement!

Competition examples:

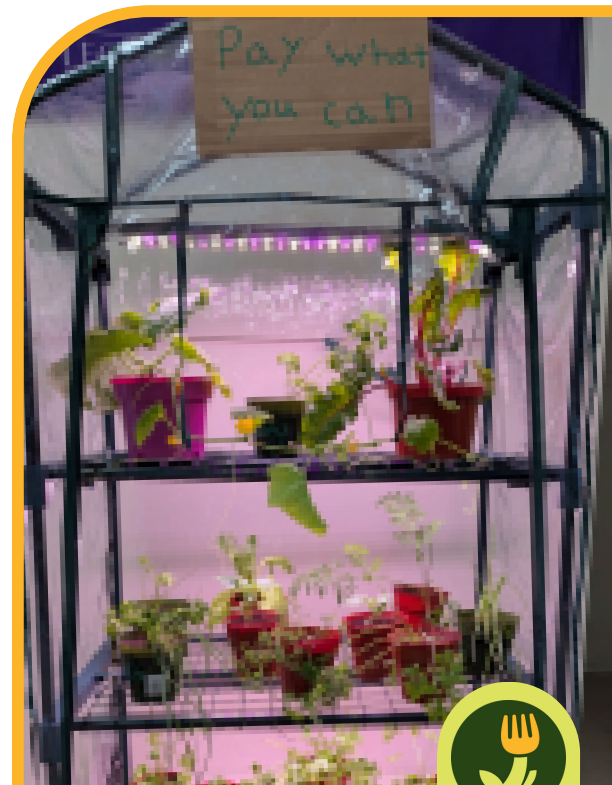
- Plant growth speed.
- Best taste/smell.
- Design a recipe with the ingredients grown.

5 Plant Sales

One of the most successful projects a garden club can facilitate is a community plant sale. Incorporating entrepreneurship lessons into the gardening programming is a great way to scale the club and create a final project for the students before the end of the school year. Selling off all the plants the students grew is a fantastic way to engage with the community, to give the students a sense of accomplishment, and interact in agriculture and farming as a business.

Plant sale ideas:

- Tag along at craft fairs and set up a booth with “Plants for Sale”.
- Invite the community to the school grounds to show off the outdoor garden projects and purchase plants.





Wellbeing in the Garden

Social Learning

Gardening is a great way to help students build connections and share experiences with one another. Facilitators can foster engagement between peers during activities to develop collaboration skills and strengthen communication skills. They can also help a student build their social capital with their peers by letting them invite a friend to participate in the garden activity. Students who struggle to build friendships can thrive in a 'gardening buddy' activity that encourages engagement and creates a shared purpose to spend time together.

Emotional Learning

A garden club is a great program for students who enjoy engaging with their senses like smell, taste, touch, and sight. Students can also develop their understanding of empathy as they care for and tend to a plant or garden. A facilitator can integrate talks about self-care into garden upkeep tasks or simply host meaningful discussions with students while gardening.

Outdoor Learning

Outdoor gardening creates opportunities for students to be outside of the school and to engage in hands-on learning either by preparing or tending to the school garden. Building garden skills means practicing coordination, measurement skills and involves physical activity, all while getting fresh air. This is another element of garden activity that promotes student well-being.



Methods of Gardening

When implementing your school garden program you can utilize many different types of gardening methods and techniques, but it will depend on your indoor and outdoor space, resources, and participants' needs.

Outdoor Gardening

Outdoor gardens expose students to the natural environment and provide opportunities for physical activity. Soil-based gardening engages students in natural ecosystems and learning about soil health, biodiversity, pollinators, and insects.

Assess the barriers and needs of your school community and adapt your outdoor gardening method to overcome challenges and serve your participants best.

Recommended outdoor garden methods:

- Raised beds
- Large pots
- Planter boxes

Indoor Gardening

Indoor gardening allows for year-round growing in classrooms or communal spaces where students can have daily access to learning about plant care.

Hydroponic gardening is easy to learn, the plants grow quickly, and it's relatively hands-off. It eliminates the need for soil and uses nutrient-rich water and controlled lighting to sustain plant growth. Hydroponics is ideal for indoor or urban environments as it requires less space.

Recommended indoor garden methods:

- Containers
- Hydroponic systems

Factors to Consider

- Space Availability
- Accessibility
- Program Goals
- Creating an Inclusive Experience



Guide to Hydroponics



Securing Funding

Finding Sponsors, Managing Money, Collecting Supplies

The continuation of your gardening program can sometimes rely on financial support and access to supplies and materials. Finding financial sponsors and material donations can be a necessary job for the garden club facilitator. Local businesses and community organizations may be willing to provide grants or supply the program with important materials. Reach out to your community and ask for support, you'll be surprised who is willing to step up and lend a hand. Check out our Mapping Community Supports For Your School Garden resource to help assess supports for your garden club.



Mapping Community Supports

Nourish Nova Scotia supports school gardening efforts and food-based initiatives through our resources, programming, and funding. Click the buttons below for more support.

Garden Resources

Garden Support Contact

Funding Opportunities



Post-Garden Club

Program Sustainability

Sustaining Student Participation

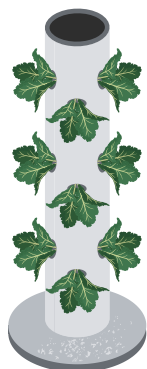
Empowering Young Gardeners, Growing their Passion, Holding their Interest

One of the best ways to ensure the garden club is sustainable is to make sure that all club members have a sense of ownership over the program and their garden projects (i.e., student-led). The sustainability of the program relies on the students' interest, their passion for the projects, and the ability to transfer what they have learned to gardening projects later in life, home, or further education.

Student-Led Approaches

Name a Plant: Naming a plant may increase the students' interest in helping it thrive. It will also improve the feeling of ownership. Personalizing activities like this is a great way to sustain participation, but also be aware that they may form an attachment with the plant. If the plant dies, be prepared to help them understand a plant's life cycle. This primarily concerns younger grade levels.

Take Home a Plant: Once you have provided the students with the knowledge to tend to and care for a plant, allow them to take it home and take care of it on their own. This may have varying outcomes, and it is wise to inform the parents in advance.



Hi, I'm
Fredrika!

Engagement Tip

Having the students name the hydroponics machine is a great way to increase interest in the project and willingness to take care of and respect the device.

Tip for Success

Identify the living conditions of your school's surrounding community.

- What kind of access to gardening do students have outside of school?
- If your school is rural, there is a higher chance that students can garden at home.
- If your school is urban, the chances of at-home gardening are lower. For urban schools, facilitators may want to prioritize hydroponics or potted plants.



Growing at Home: If your program has extra soil, pots, and seeds, you can send home a package of supplies for families to engage in gardening together at home. This will build greater passion for young gardeners, but also strengthen family connections through at-home projects. To make it simple for the parents or guardians at home, send easy-to-grow plants and write provide growing instructions.

Design a Uniform: For your garden club, design and personalize some sort of uniform so that the students can connect through visuals.

Uniform ideas:

- Decorate a small shovel.
- Decorate gardening gloves with a logo.
- A long-sleeved shirt for outdoor gardening.
- Design your own knee pads.
- Design your own apron.



Tip for Success

As an initial garden club activity, have students design and paint their own gardening aprons. Make sure the students plan out their design before painting.

Supplies needed:

- A fabric apron with minimal pattern.
- Acrylic paint.
- Design templates.





Succession Planning

Planning for the Future and Sustaining Growth

Succession Planning

It is crucial to plan for when you (the garden facilitator) are no longer working in the position, but the garden club continues on. As a program facilitator, your work is valued, appreciated, and important, but for the students, it is important to set up a plan so that the club does not rely on one facilitator alone.

Succession planning is a commonly neglected aspect of programming in schools and is often why so many school gardens are underused and overgrown. This guide intends to solve that problem and be a tool that facilitators can return to and use to restart a garden or club if it has been neglected.

Network Building

Consider collaborating with nearby schools to build relationships between school communities. This is helpful if a student moves to another school and leaves your garden club, so they know how to get involved at another school. This is especially important for the transition from Elementary to Junior High. Growing the network of gardeners is a great way to build community and demonstrate how students are planting and caring for gardens at their schools.

Tip for Success

You can use this guide as your succession plan! Print it off, file it away, and share it with your successor when the day comes that you can no longer run the garden club. Take notes of the projects that you do, and file them away with this guide for a future facilitator to learn from.



Garden Club Resources

The following pages include key resources for the planning and implementation of the garden club. You may want to print some or all of these pages.

Tips for Success

- Involve your community and community partners (e.g., youth groups or youth-serving organizations) at the start of your program planning. This will not only help you understand the needs of your intended participants, but they will be more likely to benefit from and enjoy the program.
- Contact Nourish Nova Scotia staff for planning support as needed. We're here to help!
- Consult participants to determine if there are growing projects they might be interested in.
- Encourage participants to be adventurous and explore ingredients grown that they're unfamiliar with & to not "yuck someone's yum".

Other Resources on our Website

- Garden Lesson Series
- Pollinator Bingo
- School Garden Resource Guide



Garden Club Checklist

Pre-Garden Club Tasks

- ☐ *Find Your Passion* – motivate yourself and get excited about gardening in school.
- ☐ *Know Your School*– identify participant needs, learning styles, and challenges.
- ☐ Communicate with school staff and find partners to start a garden club.
- ☐ Complete a SWOT Analysis of your school community and potential garden club.
- ☐ Secure a space to facilitate programming and store supplies.
- ☐ Collect materials such as gardening supplies for programming.
- ☐ Read through this guide and other supplementary references.

During Garden Club Tasks

- ☐ *Code of conduct* – create an accessible, inclusive and respectful environment.
- ☐ *Communicate objectives* – explain program activities and projects to participants.
- ☐ *Encourage participation* – use participant engagement strategies in this guide.
- ☐ *Be flexible* – monitor club social dynamics and adapt activities if needed.
- ☐ *Welcome feedback* – check-in with participants to ensure an enjoyable experience.

Post Garden Club Tasks

- ☐ *Reflect* – improve areas of your program based on success and challenges.
- ☐ *Student input* – reflect student wants and interests in future programming.
- ☐ *Plan it out* – set up a schedule of sessions for a few weeks or months.
- ☐ *Collaborate* – connect and share with other like minded facilitators and educators.
- ☐ *Secure funding* – find grant opportunities to grow and sustain your programming.

My Garden Journal

Draw an Observation

Write an Observation

Name:

Date: