

Caring for a school garden over the summertime

Our Spring season's article focused on how to plan a school-based community garden, following the Square Foot Garden (Bartholomew, 2013). For our Summer edition, we focus on how to keep the school garden alive during July and August, no easy feat.

First thing's first is to recruit heavily. Early in June, send a letter home with all of the children who are involved in the garden club at your school. In order to have support all summer long, you need to make sure the parents are informed. As always, don't forget to loop in the administration and custodians. In this case, definitely ask permission first, instead of begging for forgiveness later, since there may be insurance liabilities at stake.

Once you have a small army of volunteers, create a sign-up sheet that covers one week at a time, all summer long. If you are planning on vacationing, ask another teacher to monitor the garden for you. One 7-day drought could jeopardize the entire school garden project, along with all of your blood, sweat, and tears.



Keep the to-do list simple, and the tools handy. If you do not have storage under lock & key, make sure your volunteers bring their own shovels, yard waste bags, and watering cans (and water!!!). Our school is adjacent to a local creek, and so we can fill-up there, but if you are not so lucky, consider buying a rain barrel from Vessna at the U-Help Foundation in Uxbridge, Uhelpfoundation@outlook.com or 416-419-5109 or info@RainBarrelFundraising.com

As any gardener knows, weeds can quickly get out of hand, so make sure you add a thick layer

of mulch just before school lets out. An added benefit of mulching is that, when applied 5 to 10 centimeters, it will reduce the amount of water lost to evaporation by shading the soil, and will act as an insulator keeping roots of the plants at a constant temperature (eXtension.org).

If all goes well, when the school doors burst open on September 3rd, you can greet your students with freshly grown carrots, tomatoes, lettuce, cucumbers, zucchinis, you name it! Nothing says "happy first day of school" like a handful of fresh fruit and veg!

Coming up in Autumn's newsletter, we invite you to share your schoolyard garden stories with us! Email adrian_778@hotmail.com with your own foray into garden with school children!

References:

Batholomew, Mel (2013). All New Square Foot Gardening, Second Edition: The Revolutionary Way to Grow More In Less Space. Retrieved from <https://www.amazon.ca/Square-Foot-Gardening-Second-Revolutionary/dp/1591865484>

Sharing nature's bounty with students

Our summer season's article focused on how to keep the school garden alive during July and August. This time around, I will be sharing my personal journey leading the garden and cooking clubs at my school.

It all began last September, 2018. As I returned to work after a two-year leave of absence, I felt a renewed sense of purpose, having been inspired by students and teachers all around the world, from Australia to Thailand. Kids had been growing veggies, learning about permaculture and taking care of the planet. I wanted to do that at my school too!

First off, gardening takes capital, so I applied to as many grants as I could find. My school, École Walter E. Harris, was the proud recipient of both the *Whole Kids Foundation* and the *Farm to Cafeteria Canada* seed grants.

With this infusion of cash, I bought new tools, a bunch of bamboo pots, vegetable seeds,

trays, a germination heat mat, a grow light, potting soil, lumber, hand tools, and cooking equipment. Not only was my school going to build raised beds to grow fresh vegetables, we were going to cook them too! Never in my



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teaching career have I run an extra-curricular with such passionate and committed students. When it comes to food, kids don't mess around.

So as the doors swung open on September 3rd, 2019, we came full circle. The students took joy in eating freshly grown tomatoes of all colours, shapes and sizes, basil, spinach,

cucumbers, yellow zucchinis, onion, basil, and sunflowers. The grade 7s have made salsa, soup, and sauce, all from the bumper tomato crop.

As we look ahead to 2020, and celebrate our school's 50th anniversary, I continue to map new gardening spaces with the students, as we expand the goal of feeding more kids fresh

veg. Showing youngsters how to grow and cook their own food will teach them valuable life skills, and demonstrate to them what food security and sustainable living looks like!

Know of a school that is actively growing food? I'd love to hear about it! Please email me at adrian_778@hotmail.com

Winter projects for school gardens ~ Seeds and Sprouts

Our autumn season's article shone a spotlight on what I am doing with students at my school in terms of garden and cooking clubs. This season, as the days grow shorter and the nights grow longer, we will delve into the topic of seeds and sprouts!

Just because the mercury has dipped below freezing, does not mean you have to stop growing food! One of nature's most nutritious snacks also happens to be one of the easiest to prepare. I am talking about sprouts!

There are many types of sprouts you can grow, including mung, clover, fenugreek, alfalfa, broccoli, and radish, to name a few! They are fast germinating, as long as you keep the water fresh, and the seeds rinsed. If you fail to do this, you will be exposing students to a science experiment in microbiology.

All you need is a wide mouth Mason jar, a strainer, and a cloth to start your sprouting extravaganza. You could get fancy, and purchase a sprouting system from Lee Valley, or DIY your own contraption with a screen, water holding tray and cover; the sky is the limit. A fun STEM (Science Technology Engineering Math) challenge for your students might be to design and build a sprouter using recycled materials.

On the topic of seeds: now is the time to begin ordering from catalogues so that you are ready for springtime. It is important to buy new seeds every year (in some cases), since nothing is more disappointing to youngsters than planting a seed, and waiting for weeks while nothing happens. You may be off the hook from spending money on seeds if you were organized enough to collect them from

your garden. Teaching students the importance of deadheading flowers and saving seeds goes a long way towards instilling a sustainable mindset. Just be sure to store seeds away from heat, light, and moisture. Finally, check out William Dam Seeds (www.damseeds.ca). They have high quality products for nearly every plant species you can imagine!

Know of a school that is actively growing food? I'd love to hear about it! Please email me at adrian_778@hotmail.com

Instructions and supplies

www.westcoastseeds.com/blogs/how-to-grow/grow-sprouts

www.instructables.com/id/Ulimate-Step-by-Step-Sprouting-Guide



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