

Gardening in Afterschool Programs



A Briefing Paper

By Sam Piha and Samantha Fasen

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Sam Piha (he/him) has served as founder and president of Temescal Associates since 2007. Sam began his career in 1974 as an afterschool worker, an experience that led to 13 years of classroom teaching and work as a child and family counselor and school social worker. Between 1989 and 2006, Sam managed school-based youth programs at the regional and national levels. He later founded Temescal Associates and The How Kids Learn Foundation, both dedicated to improving the quality of afterschool programs. Sam served as editor and contributing author of several important practice guides and journal articles on afterschool programming. Sam holds a master's degree in Social Welfare.



Samantha Fasen (she/her) joined Temescal Associates and the How Kids Learn Foundation in 2019 and has fully embraced her work with the afterschool field. She helps to coordinate and develop marketing campaigns and multimedia elements to reach a wider audience and share with people the importance of out-of-school time and youth development.



Ren Daraio (they/she) brings over 35 years of experience working in the field of youth development as a facilitator, trainer, and coach. She has experience training and coaching diverse audience groups, from afterschool practitioners and parents to funders and technical assistance providers. Prior to her work with Temescal Associates, Ren was the Deputy Director at the Community Network for Youth Development and a consultant for the Institute for Research and Reform in Education.

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATIONS

[Temescal Associates](#) is dedicated to building the capacity of leaders and organizations in education and youth development who organizations, and policy makers.

[The How Kids Learn Foundation](#) (HKLF) is a 501(c)(3) organization. It is dedicated to improving the effectiveness of settings that support the education and healthy development of youth. This includes schools and out-of-school time programs. The HKL Foundation provides educational and training activities that promote the capacity of organizations that support the education and healthy development of youth. Examples of activities include conferences, speaker forums, screenings of relevant films, training sessions, coaching sessions, the awarding of digital badges to acknowledge exemplar programs and the learning that happens within these settings. Activities also include the development and distribution of educational materials (papers, self-assessment tools, videos, program guides, etc.). You can see a [catalogue of the resources](#) we've produced for the afterschool field.

Front Cover Photo: [Akoma Unity Center](#)

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Source: The Urban Garden Initiative

Gardening in Afterschool Programs



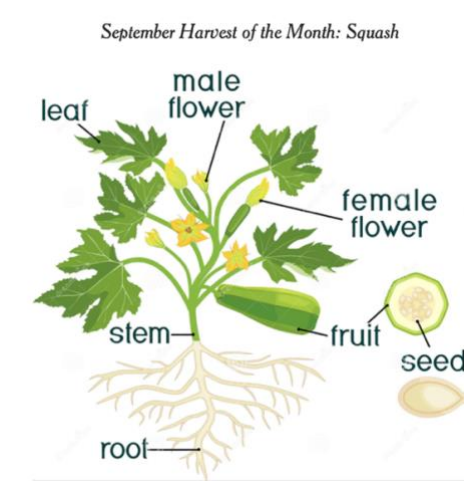
Source: NHP Foundation

INTRODUCTION

*“You’ve probably never heard someone argue that outdoor activities are harmful for children. There’s been an impressive amount of research in the last decade to suggest the exact opposite. But it’s one thing to believe nature is good for your kids and another thing to establish habits that put the belief into practice. This is where gardening for kids comes in. As outdoor activities go, gardening is hard to beat for promoting well-rounded development in youngsters.”*¹

Research tells us that young people’s connection to the outdoors and nature contributes to their healthy development. This connection can be promoted by involving youth in gardening. And afterschool programs are particularly well positioned to offer gardening activities.

*“By incorporating a garden into an afterschool program, educators can create a dynamic and enriching environment that promotes active learning, fosters a connection with nature, and encourages positive health and environmental habits among participants.”*²



Source: OUSD's 'Dig In'

HOW TO USE THIS BRIEFING PAPER

The contents of this paper are drawn from existing writings on gardening with youth. This paper is designed to raise understanding and awareness of the impact of gardening on youth and how afterschool programs can utilize this activity. It also provides resources for afterschool and organizational leaders. We recommend that program leaders share this paper with organizational leaders (school leaders and staff, supervisors at the parent non-profit org, etc.) and program staff as they consider the best ways to incorporate gardening into their program.



Source: [Farming the Future](#)

BENEFITS OF ENGAGING YOUTH IN GARDENING

There are many benefits for young people who are engaged in gardening.

“Through school gardens, students become stewards of the environment and gain a stake in the community and the world. This empowers them to discover the connections between personal health, education and opportunity.”³

According to author Brianna Flavin (Rasmussen University), there are many benefits to engaging children and adolescents in gardening activities:



“1. It encourages them to eat healthier: It makes some intuitive sense. Half the fun of gardening is getting to eat what you grow. But the positive effect a sun-warmed strawberry has on your little ones will continue to ripple throughout their lives.

2. It provides engaging, moderate exercise: If you’ve ever spent an afternoon in the garden, you’ve probably experienced time flying and sore that students involved

in hands-on school gardening programs developed.

“These days all kids could benefit from a little more physical activity and sunshine they’ll get while gardening. Activities like moving soil, carrying a heavy watering can, digging in the dirt and pushing a wheelbarrow can promote gross motor skills and overall strength for a more fit body. Plus, these activities, known as “heavy work,” have been shown to help kids stay calm and focused.”⁴

3. It builds a sense of confidence: Teachers and parents alike recognize how crucial confidence can be in a child's ability to grow and learn. The process of tending a plant and seeing it bloom or produce food takes time and patience, but the payoff in satisfaction is equal to the investment.

*"It is wonderful for building a child's sense of competence, as they engage in a real-life activity that they might have previously seen as only for adults. Give any children the experience of dabbling a tiny seed into a hole, watering it, protecting it and watching it explode into life and growth—and they might just feel like they have magic powers!"*⁵

4. It develops STEM & analytical abilities: Gardening exercises important reasoning, initiation, planning and organization skills," Matthews says. She advises parents or teachers to have their kids do a little gardening research before diving in. Children can read up on the various stages of growth, the tools they'll need or different ways the plants are used after they grow

For even further development, Matthews suggests working on math and science skills by encouraging your children to observe their plants' life cycles. "Children can measure their plants or make other observations and record their observations in a journal." Weather cycles, measuring rainfall and monitoring the insect life around the plants can also foster a real scientific curiosity in your child.

5. It relieves stress: The main benefit of gardening is learning to relax," says counselor and maternal child nurse Orly Katz, LCPC. Katz emphasizes that gardening helps children make a habit of calming themselves. "Gardening allows kids to be alone, it allows them to breathe fresh air and be in peace by themselves." Research indicates that the calming effect gardening has on the brain extends even beyond the actual act of gardening.

6. It improves focus & memory: Consistent involvement in gardening can contribute to improved alertness, cognitive abilities and social skills, according to Garden Organic. The act of gardening as a therapeutic treatment (known as horticulture therapy) has shown to be particularly effective in rehabilitating motor, speech and cognitive abilities after illness. The improvements in memory and attention were even more significant when children engaged in an activity outdoors, such as—you guessed it—gardening!

7. It positively impacts mood & psychological wellbeing: Increased memory and focus are fabulous. But that is only part of the positive influence gardening has on the human brain. Garden Organic states that elements of gardening have the ability to trigger emotions in people. For example, flowers produce powerful positive emotions and have both immediate and long-term effects on emotional reactions, mood and social behavior.

Well beyond mood, gardening can also serve as a powerful therapeutic tool against depression and anxiety. Gardens and the act of gardening have been found to have a positive impact on peoples' health and wellbeing."⁶

Amy Morin, LCSW ([Very Well Family](#)) adds to these named benefits:

Plant Care Fosters Responsibility: Whether it's flowers or vegetables, caring for plants helps teenagers develop responsibility. They also gain a sense of accomplishment and self-confidence as they raise small sprouts into full blooming beauties.

Plants Offer a Great Way to Connect: Plants can be a great tool for bonding with aloof kids or to help teen siblings connect in a way that doesn't involve arguing.⁷

Authors Nimali Fernando and Melanie Potock add these benefits:

“How gardening can affect the BRAIN: There is a myriad of scientific concepts you can discuss with your kids when planting and tending to a garden. One study showed that children who participated in gardening projects scored higher in science achievement than those who did not. The wonder of seeing a garden grow may spark your kids to ask questions like: Why do the plants need sun? How does the plant “drink” water? Why are worms good for the plants? Supplement the experience of gardening with books about plants, trips to a botanical garden, or a photo journal of the plants that you are growing.

How gardening can affect the BODY: When children participate in gardening, the fruits and vegetables that they are inspired to eat will no doubt have a positive effect on their body. But the act of gardening itself can also promote a healthy body. Kids LOVE to get their hands and feet in the dirt, which can run counter to the modern parenting style of compulsively keeping hands and surfaces cleaned and sanitized. However, consider the “hygiene hypothesis,” a theory that a lack of childhood exposure to germs actually increases a child’s susceptibility to diseases like asthma, allergies and autoimmune conditions by suppressing the development of the immune system. So, getting dirty while gardening may actually strengthen a child’s immunity and overall health.

How gardening can affect the SOUL: In this electronic age, kids need time for meaningful connection. Time in the garden allows for team building and promotes communication skills. Planning a garden, planting the seeds and watching them grow give kids a sense of purpose and responsibility. Making sure that the plants get enough fertilizer, water and sun fosters mindfulness. The concepts learned while gardening, like composting food scraps for fertilizer or using gathered rainwater, can show kids a deep respect and responsibility for taking care of our planet. Furthermore, studies show that when children have contact with soil during activities like digging and planting, they have improved moods, better learning experiences and decreased anxiety.”⁸



Source: (Anne Wernikoff/KQED)

TIPS FOR PROGRAM LEADERS

For program leaders wanting to incorporate gardening into their programs, it is helpful to learn from others, which can include visiting other programs. Below we offer tips from practitioners that may be useful.



Source: Healthy Food Choices in School

The Healthy Food Choices in Schools organization offers several tips for those considering a gardening club or project:

“Many students participate in after school activities to extend their learning opportunities and spend more time with friends during the day. After school garden clubs provide a great way for students to learn about gardening and gain hands-on experience growing their own food and tasting the fruits (and vegetables!) of their labor.

Pick your space: Every garden needs sun, soil, and water. Pick your ideal sun or shade garden location on school grounds, giving thought to your need to deliver items like loads of soil and seedlings, and your access to drinkable water. Other things to consider are whether you need space to push a wheelbarrow, and if you have storage nearby for garden tools. Give yourself time for construction of any raised or in-ground beds, and for bed preparation. Be sure to place container and in-ground gardens out of the way of recess activities like bouncing balls and active feet, and away from trash receptacles that may attract other critters.

Pick your growing season: Decide if you want to host a fall garden club, a spring garden club, or a year-round club, and decide how frequently your club will meet. During the warmer gardening months, a lot can happen in a week! Pick your crops based on season, and length of growing time. Students will be most excited to see crops go from seedlings to fruit stage, and then to harvest. Remember that most students are not in school during the heavy summer growing season, so plan accordingly.



Source: Smithsonian Gardens

Water: Your garden will need water—lots of water. Make sure that you have access to a hose that provides drinkable water throughout the garden season. It's a good idea to create a watering schedule and have backups.

Invite many friends: A garden thrives when it is well tended. Garden clubs are no exception—a successful garden club needs energetic participants. Gardening experience is helpful, but not nearly as necessary as enthusiasm and a willingness to work hard and get your hands dirty. A good ratio is one adult for every 5-6 students. This ratio should provide time for some one-on-one instruction, and provides oversight for proper use of garden tools.

Safety first: All in-ground garden spaces should have the soil tested for lead and other contaminants prior to planting. One exception is if you are starting a container garden and using bagged soil and organic matter that you know to be free of contaminants. When adding soil to your garden beds, be sure it is an appropriate soil mix for growing produce. Also consider whether your garden needs fencing to keep out deer, rabbits, raccoons, or other critters that enjoy fresh produce. You will want to ensure that anything you put in the garden is safe for children to handle, and that the produce will be safe to eat. Use of manure and pesticides are not acceptable practices for youth gardens.

Gather supplies: Make a wish list of your garden supplies and circulate it to your school community. You will likely get many hand shovels, rakes, and buckets. School fundraisers are another great way to get funds for larger items like wood for bed construction, wheelbarrows, hoses, and fencing. Local businesses may be willing to donate supplies, and many organizations have grant funding available for school garden projects. A minimal list to get started includes soil, seedlings/seeds, a hose, shovels, and gloves for participants.

Choose a theme: Remember that the garden is more than just a growing space—it is an outdoor classroom. Many students enjoy growing gardens that have themes. Popular ones include pizza gardens, herb gardens, butterfly/pollinator gardens, and native plant gardens. You can also create an ABC garden, a math garden, storybook garden, or international garden to reinforce classroom concepts. Have students decorate the garden with creative signage.

Manage expectations: Gardening is a wonderful learning experience. It is also an exercise in patience, trial and error, and working with uncontrollable variables like the weather. Visit other school gardens for ideas and inspiration, and get the students involved from the start. You may grow a bumper crop, or you may get a few tiny carrots. And that's okay—know that whatever your students cultivate will be a worthwhile learning experience.”⁹

“By incorporating a garden into an afterschool program, educators can create a dynamic and enriching environment that promotes active learning, fosters a connection with nature, and encourages positive health and environmental habits among participants.”¹⁰

Additional tips for incorporating a garden into an afterschool program are offered by Damon Carr (Farming the Future):

“Engage Stakeholders: Involve parents, teachers, and community members in the planning process to build support and ensure the garden aligns with the afterschool program's goals.

Start Small: Begin with a manageable garden space and simple gardening activities, gradually expanding as the program gains momentum and student interest grows.

Design Theme Gardens: Create theme gardens, such as a sensory garden or a pollinator garden, to provide diverse learning opportunities and sensory experiences.

Tailor Activities: Adapt gardening activities to accommodate various age groups and abilities, ensuring that all participants can actively engage in the garden.

Hands-On Learning: Use the garden as a hands-on learning environment, incorporating science, math, and environmental lessons into gardening activities.

Cultivate Creativity: Encourage artistic expression by incorporating garden-related art projects, such as garden sculptures or nature-inspired crafts.

Healthy Snacks: Use harvested produce to promote healthy eating habits, offering fresh snacks or hosting cooking activities with garden-grown ingredients.

Environmental Stewardship: Teach students about environmental stewardship and sustainability through composting, water conservation, and eco-friendly gardening practices.

Garden Journals: Have students keep garden journals to document their experiences, observations, and reflections throughout the gardening journey.

Community Events: Host garden-related events, such as garden tours, harvest celebrations, or family gardening days, to involve the broader community and showcase the program's impact.”¹¹

For more information or to implement a garden program in your school, contact Damon Carr at: Damon@ftfeducation.com

Also, be mindful of potential problems that may arise, such as critters that may feed on the garden (insects, mice, deer, etc.) or vandalism.

PARTNERSHIPS

Partnering with other can be very beneficial. We offer some ideas below:

Community Gardens

According to [Smithsonian Gardens](#), *“Today's community gardens are important places in cities across the United States. They can help to revitalize neighborhoods affected by urban decline, build a sense of community, grow healthy food, teach environmental education, and create a sense of place.*

*But it is not the first time Americans have turned to community gardens to reshape city life. The community gardens we see in cities today have evolved from a long history. Since the 1890s, Americans have turned to the garden to confront social problems such as economic recession, war, urban decline, and environmental injustice.”*¹²



Source: Smithsonian Gardens

*“Many urban reformers began to create school gardens for children, particularly those of immigrants and lower-income residents. Educators feared urban life would have negative effect on children. Gardens, they hoped, would be a way to connect youth to nature, teach them responsibility, and improve their physical health.”*¹³

Is there a community garden nearby? If so, consider partnering with the community garden.

Other Community Partners

Incorporating gardening in an afterschool program can be supported by enlisting partners to assist by donating funds, materials or labor. Partners can include:

- Nonprofit Organizations, such as local garden clubs or community youth organizations.
- Community Businesses, such as nurseries, hardware & lumber stores or businesses that sell gardening supplies.
- Parents and Individuals from the larger community can provide volunteer labor or donations. They can also serve as gardening experts.

It is best to involve youth when enlisting partners or funding. Perhaps your youth participants can help identify businesses in the community that might be appropriate for a donation request and deliver the request themselves. Young people can also design posters that identify businesses that support the gardening program, which they can display in a window. Young people can also design and deliver thank you cards for businesses that donate.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Below we offer writings from afterschool practitioners who have incorporated gardening into their programs.

Growing Together: Cultivating Inclusivity in Our Community Garden



Source: Akoma Unity Center

By Guest Contributor, Akoma Unity Center. (This was originally published by [Akoma Unity Center](#).)

In a fast-paced world, finding a tranquil oasis where individuals of all ages and backgrounds can come together and connect with nature is a rare gem. Our community garden, nestled in the heart of the city, is precisely that and so much more. Beyond being a sanctuary for plant enthusiasts, it is a thriving hub that celebrates diversity, fosters collaboration, and cherishes the spirit of shared learning. In this blog post, we invite you to explore how our community garden has blossomed into a truly inclusive space, embracing everyone, regardless of their age, background, or gardening experience.

Cultivating Diversity: Step foot into our community garden, and you'll witness a vibrant tapestry of faces and stories from various walks of life. We take immense pride in providing an open-armed welcome to individuals of all ages, backgrounds, and levels of gardening expertise. Whether you're a seasoned gardener or a complete novice, you'll find yourself embraced by a warm and supportive community.

The Power of Collaboration: At the heart of our community garden lies the essence of collaboration. Here, gardeners don't just tend to their own plots; they work together, exchange ideas, and lend a helping hand. It's a place where experienced green thumbs generously share their knowledge with beginners, fostering an environment of growth and camaraderie. Through joint efforts, we not only cultivate beautiful blooms and delicious produce but also cultivate lasting friendships.

Respect and Understanding: *Respect is the cornerstone of our garden's culture. We celebrate the uniqueness of each individual, understanding that our diverse backgrounds enrich our collective experience. Here, conversations flow freely, and perspectives are exchanged with an open mind. We learn from one another, breaking down barriers and building bridges of understanding that transcend age, culture, and language.*



Source: Akoma Unity Center

Learning Together: *Our community garden is more than just a place to dig in the dirt; it's a haven of continuous learning. Seasoned horticulturists share their wisdom through workshops and tutorials, while young enthusiasts infuse the space with fresh ideas and innovations. Together, we explore sustainable gardening practices, experiment with new crops, and embrace the ever-evolving world of horticulture.*

An Inclusive Space for All: *As the sun sets behind the horizon, casting a golden glow on our bountiful garden, the sense of belonging is palpable. Children play, elders share stories, and friendships blossom across generations. Our community garden is a testament to the power of inclusivity, where the simple act of planting seeds cultivates a sense of togetherness.*

Conclusion: *Our community garden stands as a living testament to the beauty of embracing diversity and nurturing an inclusive space. It is a place where laughter reverberates, friendships flourish, and a shared passion for nature unites us all. As we invite you to step into this blossoming sanctuary, we extend an open invitation to everyone, welcoming you to become a part of our green family. Together, let's continue sowing the seeds of inclusivity, respect, and shared learning in the fertile soil of our community garden.*



How to Start an After School Garden Club for Elementary Students: Part 1

By Guest Contributor Carol Labuzzetta, MS (This was originally published on Medium.com.)

After working with young children, aged 7–11, for 13 years in an afterschool garden club I founded, I couldn't agree more...Why not offer an after-school garden club for the students at this elementary school? I was already a classroom volunteer. I knew many of the students and some of the teachers. I just needed to get approval from someone in charge.

First, I worked out the details of the club. I wanted my idea to be solid before I presented it to the principal. The principal was the person in charge of her building, grounds.



Source: Farming the Future

This is how things went:

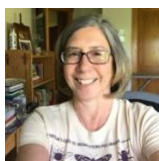
- *Once that day arrived, I collected all the forms from the office where the teachers had dropped them off. Using the forms, I collated them by teacher/grade and made my attendance list. There were some interesting observations about this and I'll share them in another post.*
- *Our meetings covered a wide range of topics. There were some topics that I felt needed to be covered each year. These included plant life cycles, seeds, and maybe one or two more. I also surveyed the students each year to see what they wanted to learn. After all, it was their club! We covered butterfly gardening, monarch life cycles, flower bulbs, carnivorous plants, conifer trees, vermicomposting, fungi, corn, holiday plants, why the leaves change color, terrariums, soil study, annuals and perennials for flower gardening, cacti and succulents, tree observations on school grounds, plant lore and legends, and more.*
- *Each meeting started with attendance, an interactive informational section complete with handouts, and then a hands-on activity that connected to the topic we had just discussed. The meeting was split in half with the first half for the information and the second half for the activity. Over time, we did some really big projects like certifying a monarch waystation (2008), planting a new tree on school grounds, making bluebird houses, running two plant sales for fundraisers, conducting research projects on plants, and pollinators, and planting the butterfly garden each spring.*

Lastly, you should know that the name, Garden Club, was really a misnomer. We ended up learning and doing so much more than putting plants in the ground! It should have been called something different. But, "Garden Club" worked and we kept the name for thirteen years — even though the students were exposed to every subject area during our meetings. I taught in an interdisciplinary fashion and incorporated all subject areas into each of our lessons. It wasn't just gardening or life science, it was so much more!¹⁴

MORE ABOUT...



[Akoma Unity Center](#) (AUC) is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit, grassroots organization committed to the progress of African American youth, families, and communities. Akoma's programs and services are specifically designed to meet the needs of historically excluded African American youth and communities. Programs include; Afterschool Program, Summer Day Camp, SOUL FOOD Community Dinner Night, male mentoring program, Rites of Passage, Advocacy for youth of color, STEAM Fair- Back to School Giveaway and Toy/Coat giveaway.



Carol Labuzzetta, MS Natural Resources, MS Nursing-Environmental educator with a passion for teaching youth using the science of awe.

Voices From the Field: Gardening in Afterschool



Source: Real Options for City Kids

Research tells us that young people's connection to the outdoors and nature contributes to their healthy development. This connection can be promoted by involving youth in gardening. And afterschool programs are particularly well positioned to offer gardening activities.

To learn more, we interviewed Natalie Gustin-Toland, Outdoor Education and Recreation Director, [Real Options for City Kids](#).

Q: CAN YOU BRIEFLY DESCRIBE YOUR ORGANIZATION AND WHAT YOU ARE DOING CONCERNING GARDENING WITH KIDS?

A: I work with non-profit Real Options for City Kids which provides services to youth and their families in the Visitacion Valley neighborhood, in San Francisco. We serve the community in a myriad of ways, one of which is through our Outdoor Education Program. Our program brings youth on outdoor adventures, builds skills and knowledge for youth and families, and provides weekly outdoor education, science and gardening classes to youth in afterschool programs.

Q: A GARDENING PROGRAM IN AFTERSCHOOL- WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS FOR YOUTH?

A: There are so many benefits for youth and the general community related to gardening in afterschool. First off time in afterschool is plentiful, and we usually aren't striving to meet the rigorous academic standards like teachers are working towards during the day. We are able to provide time and space in a more flexible setting for youth to connect with natural spaces, such as gardens.

Students in afterschool are able to connect with plants and gardening informally, doing activities like digging in the dig zone, watering the plants, catching and studying bugs, sketching, and cooking with the food grown in the garden. These spaces are also frequently maintained by students after school, especially in communities who cannot afford garden educators during the day. Maintained spaces not

only teach youth about how to care for nature, but also contribute to the beauty of the school overall. Caring for spaces on the schoolyard not only instills school pride, but also promotes leadership and ownership over spaces on school campuses. Another great component of gardening afterschool is the ways in which you can incorporate aspects of community engagement. This can look like growing crops which reflect cultural foods from the populations of the neighborhood. Families can be invited in to teach about crops, recipes or medicinal uses for plants grown which align with their cultural heritage. Students can also run leadership projects such as farmers markets or seasonal produce tastings for the community.

Q: WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL CHALLENGES?

A: Access to resources such as planting space, supplies and funds to buy supplies are all barriers to gardening in afterschool programs. Many schools have gardens, but not all are maintained, and some afterschool programs do not take place in spaces with access to nature. Finding staff with the skill set to lead classes like gardening and outdoor education can be tough as well. Lastly, finding a curriculum which fits the needs, and the skillset of the program can take some time to work out.



Source: Real Options for City Kids

Q: HOW SHOULD AN ORGANIZATION PREPARE ITSELF TO INCORPORATE GARDENING?

A: Find the space you can garden in. You can think outside of the box if no space is available such as partnering with local community gardens, community centers or senior centers. Additionally, projects such as milk carton planting are fun as starter units for gardening if you want to try it out, that don't require an established garden. Finding a skilled teacher who has the knowledge base around caring for green spaces and growing food is also helpful. Finding a curriculum to align with is also helpful for programs that do not have capacity to design their own curriculum. Lastly, always thinking of longevity and maintenance for spaces, who cares for the garden over breaks in programming? How can you set these spaces up for success in the long run?

Q: ANY RESOURCES THAT YOU WOULD RECOMMEND?

A: [Life Lab](#) has an awesome free gardening curriculum adapted from the late Education Outside program. [Mystery Science](#) also has fun units and curriculum to inspire. [Science Action Club](#) from the Academy of Science provides a great curriculum aligned with garden programs featuring units with topics such as bugs and birds. Additionally, you can use the apps [Inaturalist](#) or seek to engage in citizen science in your gardens! If you are looking to build existing staff knowledge around gardening practices, [Garden for the Environment](#) in San Francisco hosts workshops about gardening, however there are other organizations like this one if you are in another place, even checking out local garden stores for flyers or other community connection leads.



Source: Real Options for City Kids

Q: ARE THERE ANY ORGANIZATIONS TO CONSIDER PARTNERING WITH? (COMMUNITY GARDENS, PARENTS, LOCAL BUSINESSES, ETC.) TO GET DONATIONS? TO LEARN MORE?

A: I highly recommend finding a local garden partner. In Visitacion Valley we partner with the [Visitacion Valley Greenway](#). With them we have access to experienced gardeners, supplies and gardening space for larger scale projects. We are also always on the hunt for grants which will help fund furthering our gardens, the [Whole Kids](#) grant for example is a great one, it also comes with resources to learn and support your program!

Additionally, there can be lots of local businesses and organizations to support. Here in the SF area, we have reached out to local businesses such as [Sloat Gardens](#), and [Flora Grubbs Gardens](#) for donations. Our chapter of the [California Native Plant Society](#) also has supported us with donations of plants, and a plan for where to plant them.

Q: WOULD YOU OFFER ANY ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR PROGRAM LEADERS?

A: Make sure you connect with community members in the spaces you plant at, and make sure the spaces aren't already spoken for, or that stakeholders don't already have plans for them is helpful if applicable (i.e. classroom teachers if at a school, PTA etc.). Additionally, gaining community investment, what would the community like to see in those spaces? Pollinator attracting plants? Trees or tall plants for shade? Food growth for cooking classes? This can help you shape your plans for your classes or clubs.



Source: Whole Kids Foundation

MORE ABOUT...



Natalie Gustin-Toland is a San Francisco Bay Area-based educator who has dedicated her career to serving in the Outdoor Education and Out of School Time fields. Over the past decade she has focused her work on program management, working in spaces such as summer programs, afterschool programs, outdoor education programs, and other community-based spaces. She is passionate about bringing a focus on equity and access to the table and ensuring that these principles remain integral to all aspects of her work. Connecting communities to the outdoors in order to foster lifelong passion and agency in nature is the cornerstone of Natalie's purpose.



Real Options for City Kids Since 1994, R.O.C.K. has served the needs of children in the community by providing structured programs that foster personal development within a safe, loving and supportive environment. With the help of our programs, children who might not otherwise have a reasonable chance to succeed are granted a level playing field.

MORE VOICES FROM FIELD ON GARDENING IN AFTERSCHOOL



Source: Courtesy of Change The Tune

Afterschool programs are particularly well positioned to engage youth in gardening activities. To learn more about this, we interviewed two afterschool practitioners: Sara Brown (SB), Garden Educator and Coordinator, A.P. Giannini Middle School, SFUSD, and Charli Kemp (CK), Executive Director, Change the Tune.

Q: WILL YOU BRIEFLY DESCRIBE YOUR GARDENING PROGRAM?

SB: The APG Garden Program hosts inquiry based environmental education classes during the school day and hosts a Garden Lunch Club twice a week. We also offer community engagement opportunities for community members both during and outside of school time.

CK: Part of our innovation comes from focusing on food justice. Our goal is to build the capacity in our youth who are our future leaders to be able to not replicate broken systems, but to build sound powerful structures that are designed to center the voices of the collective. Part of that work centers food justice and gardening. By teaching youth how to grow their own food and then cook their own food, they learn a variety of soft and hard skills that prepare them to understand we are what we eat. We have to cultivate our wellness through our work with the soil and our food.

Q: WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BENEFITS OF GARDENING WITH YOUTH?

SB: Benefits to the youth:

- Hands on project based learning opportunities, cooking with fresh fruits and vegetables!
- Science exploration, inquiry-based learning opportunities.
- Getting students outside interacting with the natural world
- Give students who don't thrive in a classroom setting alternative modes of learning
- Skill building i.e. learning to use new tools and how to take care of living things

Benefits to staff:

- Hands on learning and teaching opportunities
- Project-based learning, staff isn't constantly having to come up with new lesson plans, projects can be ongoing
- Skill building i.e. learning to use new tools and how to take care of living things

CK:

- Healthier food options
- Opportunity to apply STEM concepts
- Clarity around the food chain process
- Building connection to our land and our soil
- Joy in the learning space.

Q: WHAT ARE SOME OF THE POTENTIAL CHALLENGES?

SB:

- Accepting that it will take a long time for it to feel sustainable, the first few years there will probably be a lot of disappointments
- Having the capacity for a staff to be continuously caring for the garden
- Things in the natural world are less likely to go according to plan
- Sustainability, how can we make sure this can be a continuous program?

CK: Finding the resources and capacity to continue programming.



Source: Courtesy of Change The Tune

Q: HOW SHOULD A PROGRAM PREPARE ITSELF TO INCORPORATE GARDENING?

SB:

- A maintenance plan i.e: Who is going to water, take care of the soil, do pest management?
- Think long-term what will happen over school breaks, what seasons will the garden need more support and utilize volunteer support
- Start small, with something you know you have the capacity to maintain, i.e.: 1-2 garden beds and maybe a worm compost bin

CK:

- Talk to your constituents. Ask what they would like to do.
- Engage local experts, create collaboration and partnership opportunities.

Q: ANY RESOURCES THAT YOU WOULD RECOMMEND?

SB:

- School Garden Support Organization Network (SGSO), <https://sgsonetwork.org/>
- Edible Schoolyard, for curricular support, <https://edibleschoolyard.org/resource-search>

CK: <https://plantpluglosangeles.com/>

Q: ARE THERE ANY ORGANIZATIONS TO CONSIDER PARTNERING WITH? (COMMUNITY GARDENS, PARENTS, LOCAL BUSINESSES, ETC.) TO GET DONATIONS? TO LEARN MORE?

SB:

- Parents for volunteer support, donations of supplies
- Nurseries: will usually donate last years seeds
- Local coffee shops: for coffee grounds for compost
- Community gardens, for gardening questions and sometimes spare plant starts

CK:

- <https://plantpluglosangeles.com/>
- Home Depot, Lowes, and other local gardening business.



Source: Courtesy of Change The Tune

Q: WOULD YOU OFFER ANY ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR PROGRAM LEADERS?

SB:

- Have grace for yourself, gardening can both be very rewarding and frustrating things often don't go according to plan
- Always plant more than you think you will need
- It's okay to get starts from a nursery, somethings are really hard to grow from seeds (like alliums)
- Take care of your tools
- Plant things with an idea of what you can cook with youth

MORE ABOUT...



Sara Brown has been the garden teacher and coordinator at AP Giannini Middle School in San Francisco, for 3 years and has 7 years of experience in Environmental Education. Their work is fueled by their belief in making science learning and the natural world accessible to all. Currently, they are getting their Master's in Science Education at San Jose State

University, so that they can continue to foster non-traditional learning settings in which students can thrive. Their favorite activities in the garden are finding worms and watching the chickens run like tiny t-rexes.



Bay Area Community Resource's (BACR) mission is to promote the healthy development of individuals and families, encourage service and volunteerism, and help build community. They carry out their mission by (1) providing direct school- and community-based services, (2) connecting volunteers with opportunities to best serve their communities, and (3)

building and strengthening all of the communities they serve so that community members and institutions can effect change.



Sunset Neighborhood Beacon Center (SNBC) offers afterschool programming at several schools, including AP Giannini Middle School. It is a community-based organization serving San Francisco's Sunset District. Their mission is to provide supports and opportunities to ensure the healthy development of children, youth, and adults. Their purpose is to connect people to their passion, potential, and community.



Charli Kemp is the Executive Director of Change the Tune. She is a curator of transformative, musical-learning experiences that empower individuals to create positive systemic change. Utilizing education as a vehicle for activism, Charli is driven in her desire to end inequitable systems, to create opportunities and access for underserved communities. With Change The

Tune, she seeks to reimagine the learning space by creating revolutionary extended learning spaces that provide radical and transformational learning experiences in partnership with communities.



Change The Tune is a 501c3 nonprofit that works to close the opportunity gap for youth in underserved communities by creating holistic, radical, and transformational extended learning experiences in partnership with communal organizations. They have three key strategies in their approach to this work: create & lead programs that students love, train & develop organization & school leaders, and mobilize communities to invest in

innovative learning approaches. Change The Tune serves schools in Los Angeles, Chicago, Sommerville and the Bahamas.

HOW TO GET A GRANT AND NEEDED RESOURCES FOR A GARDENING CLUB

[Farming the Future](#) offered the following remarks on how to find funding for an afterschool gardening program.

“Having a garden for your school can be one of the most rewarding projects, not only for your students, but also for you! But, as rewarding and special as school gardens can be, they can be difficult to get started. Getting your school garden off the ground and running requires funding and support. If you are having trouble finding grants for your garden, we have just the right resources for you.

Introduction to Grants: *For starters, grants are money specially designated for a distinct purpose. They are typically given out to a wide array of those in need of specific funding like businesses, governments, and even individuals. You or your school can also apply for grants. Grants are always for a specific purpose and often require some level of reporting or compliance to the rules stipulated in the grant. In order to get a grant, you will have to apply and follow the rules and guidelines as well as answer the questions provided in the application process. There are many routes to take when applying for grants but one of the best things to do as a precursor to applying is to have a plan. Create a plan that maps out the intended garden size, potential activities, and how a garden will impact your school overall. This plan will strengthen your case to get approval for the garden from your school administration and will help you answer questions when applying for grants. The next step is to actually find grants that are for your project: a new school garden!*

Finding Grants for Your Garden Project: *‘Finding grants and applying to them can actually be one of the hardest and most frustrating things when starting a school garden.’ Not only does it seem overwhelming with the number of potential grants there are and figuring out where to start, but also applying and waiting on the results can be a pain. A potential helpful tip for this problem is to start somewhat small. Apply to small foundations and grants before swinging for the fences with the larger grants. Also, knowing the proper places for applications and committing to the work will benefit you in the long run. The process can be time consuming but ultimately very rewarding because it can lead you to your very own school garden! Here are some of the best places to find grants for your garden:*

One of the most helpful sites is called [SeedMoney](#). This foundation gives out 255 grants totaling in \$40,000 dollars to all kinds of community garden projects, as well as, school gardens. SeedMoney gives grants and raises money based on a crowdfunding challenge that runs a month long. You are also able to donate throughout the year. The great thing about this foundation is that it is a one stop shop for many grants that you could possibly qualify for. They also offer helpful tips on starting a school garden as well as all kinds of regular gardening tips once your garden is up and running.

Another amazing site for grants is [KidsGardening.org](#). This site is special because, as the title suggests, it focuses directly on kids and gardening with them. This will be such a helpful resource once your school garden is functioning. They have links and tabs for educators during the gardening process and a “Gardening Toolbox” with tips for gardening basics and activities. But, most importantly for your initial

start-up, they have a massive list of grants for potential gardens just like yours. Their grant page lists grants that Kids Gardening offer and grants from other various foundations. This site will be great before and after you get your very own school garden!

Another potential website for grants and gardening help is [Growing Spaces](#). This site focuses on selling and building domes and greenhouses, but they also have an entire page for non-profit foundations that offer grants for community gardens. Growing Spaces offers discounts to schools when buying from them which is a nice kicker along with their support. They continually update their list of potential grants and have an email and phonenumber for those with questions.

There is another route to take when finding or applying for grants and that is through credit unions. Oftentimes, credit unions offer grants to various businesses and schools in order to grow a strong community around them and support their customers. Right here in North Florida, [Envision Credit Union](#) offers their own Envision Classroom Grants. This focuses on giving teachers the opportunity to “expand their curriculum and engage their students” (Envision Credit Union). This is perfect for a school garden and the application process is quick and easy.

Getting Going: Finally, you have found your grant and are working on applying. As mentioned before, its best to have a plan so you know what you need to accomplish your goals and cement your vision for your own school garden. Application requirements for these grants will vary between each one and applying to these will certainly take time; some more than others. You just have to be prepared, patient, and persistent and you will get the school garden of your dreams. Check back in with Farming the Future for more tips, tricks, and advice on getting, having, and running your very own school garden.

More About...



[Farming The Future](#) is the leader in providing all-in-one school garden kits, classroom grow kits, student take home grow kits and aquaponics. FTF provides dynamic learning solutions for K-12 institutions utilizing agriculture, project-based learning and an online virtual teaching platform. Our programs integrate agriculture, sustainability and good nutrition with Next Generation Science Standards.”¹⁵

Below are additional ideas provided by Chat GPT on how to support an afterschool garden program:



Source: www.pexels.com

“Fundraising Events: Organize fundraising events such as bake sales, plant sales, or gardening-related workshops. Host a garden-themed fundraiser like a garden party, garden tour, or a community clean-up event.

Crowdfunding: Use online crowdfunding platforms like Kickstarter, GoFundMe, or Indiegogo to raise money for your gardening club. Create a compelling campaign that explains your club’s mission and goals.

Local Businesses and Community Support: Approach local businesses and community organizations for sponsorships or donations. Seek partnerships with local nurseries, garden centers, or landscaping companies for in-kind donations of plants, gardening tools, or expertise.

Parent and Community Involvement: Encourage parents and community members to contribute financially or donate gardening supplies and materials. Organize community workdays where volunteers can help with gardening tasks.

Educational or Environmental Organizations: Partner with educational institutions, environmental organizations, or local botanical gardens that may provide support or funding for your club.

Online and Offline Promotion: Create a website or social media presence for your gardening club to raise awareness and attract potential donors. Prepare a compelling presentation about your club's goals and needs, which can be shared with potential supporters.

Competitions and Awards: Look for gardening or environmental competitions and awards that your club can participate in to win funds or recognition.”



Source: (Anne Wernikoff/KQED)

TO LEARN MORE

In the end notes, we have linked all the articles that we reference in the paper to allow easy access. Below are some additional resources.

Articles

- [*How to Start a Kids' Garden*](#)
- [*Funding a School Garden Program*](#)
- [*How to Get a Grant for a School Garden*](#)
- [*Afterschool Garden Clubs: Planting Seeds for Success*](#)
- [*California School Garden Training Program Resources*](#)
- [*How to Start an After School Garden Club for Elementary Students: Part 1*](#)
- [*Resources for School Garden Educators*](#)
- [*Simple Gardening Club Ideas*](#)
- [*Starting a School Garden Program: Overview*](#)

Videos

- [*Planning Your Garden*](#)
- [*Building a Garden in a Day*](#)
- [*Caring for Your Garden*](#)
- [*Fears in the Garden*](#)

Websites

- [*Kids Garden Club*](#)
- [*Kids Gardening*](#)
- [*Farming the Future*](#)
- [*The School Gardens Network*](#)
- [*RHS Campaign for School Gardening*](#)
- [*United States Botanic Garden*](#)
- [*Edible Schoolyard Project*](#)

Also...

- [*Sid the Science Kid: Vegetable Planting Game*](#)
- [*Curious George: Flower Garden Game*](#)



Source: [United States Botanic Garden](#)

END NOTES

- ¹ [*Gardening for Kids: 7 Reasons Planting Seeds Enriches Their Lives*](#)
- ² [*Tips for Incorporating a Garden into an Afterschool Program*](#)
- ³ [*Garden Education*](#)
- ⁴ [*Gardening With Kids: How It Affects Your Child's Brain, Body and Soul*](#)
- ⁵ [*Gardening for Kids: 7 Reasons Planting Seeds Enriches Their Lives*](#)
- ⁶ IBID.
- ⁷ [*Benefits of Gardening for Teens*](#)
- ⁸ [*Gardening With Kids: How It Affects Your Child's Brain, Body and Soul*](#)
- ⁹ [*After School Garden Clubs: Planting Seeds for Success*](#)
- ¹⁰ [*Tips for Incorporating a Garden into an Afterschool Program*](#)
- ¹¹ IBID.
- ¹² [*Grown from the Past: A Short History of Community Gardening in the United States*](#)
- ¹³ IBID.
- ¹⁴ [*How to Start an After School Garden Club for Elementary Students: Part 1*](#)
- ¹⁵ [*How To Get a Grant for a School Garden*](#)



Source: Edutopia