

Garden Set-Up

Before your School Year Starts

July

(or sooner if possible!)

Your first year of gardening will require the most prep work. While this may seem overwhelming, good prep work will save you a lot of time and energy later on. We highly recommend seeking help from a parent or church member in order to accomplish these tasks.

- Choose the size garden you plan to grow
- Choose the location for your garden
- Begin preparing the site
- Get a soil test
- Amend the soil to your soil test
- Have a plan for how to cover your crops from frost if you live in an area where this is necessary
- Build necessary greenhouses, hoop houses, sheds, etc
- Choose what crops you will be planting and determine when you would need to plant
- Order seeds
- Order tools needed
- Update your board and sponsors
- Collect your volunteers
- Watch "The Market Gardener's Toolkit" by either renting (<https://vimeo.com/ondemand/marketgardener>) it or buying it (<https://www.amazon.com/Market-Gardeners-Toolkit-Jean-Martin-Fortier/dp/B01ER5H0BU>).

August

- Start seeds according to your plan
- Implement weed management plan
- Water seeds/seedlings regularly
- Update your board and sponsors

Choosing the size of your garden

Gardens come in all shapes and sizes! We believe that where there is a will, there's a way. While your location may not seem ideal for growing a garden, with some creativity, we believe that you can find a way to grow on your campus.

For the sake of this book, we will talk specifically about three different bed sizes (small, medium, and large). Keep in mind that this is far from the only way to grow a garden! Raised beds and container gardening may be the only option for some schools. Please carefully choose an option based on what will fit the needs of your school the best.

Garden Size	Sq. Ft. of Growing Area	Total Sq. Ft. WxL	Sq. Ft. per student (assuming 20 students)	Notes
Small (4 – 20' long beds)	200	16x20=320		Recommended for “testing the waters” or for individual classrooms. Just a demonstration garden.
Medium (8 – 40' long beds)	800	32x40=1280		Good for involving more students. Ideally it would be situated so the beds could be extended to 100' if you decide to “scale up.”
Large (8 – 100' long beds)	2000	32x100=3200		This is an ideal size for those who are seriously considering market gardening. To expand, you just keep adding more plots this size.

Choose a Garden Location

- 1) gets at least 6 hours of sunlight per day (the more the better)
- 2) does not have standing water after heavy rains or snow melts
- 3) Has at least 12 inches of soil above any bedrock
- 4) Has easy access to a water supply

*Helpful tip: choose an area where your garden is easily accessible as close to the school building as possible. Keeping your garden close to your classroom and making it a part of your school community will set you up better for success

** If you live in an area where there are a lot of deer or rabbits you may need to look into fencing for your garden

<https://borntogrow.net/home-garden-course/planning-and-preparation/choosing-the-land/>

Preparing the Site

There are many methods that could be used to prepare your garden site for planting. The method that you choose will often depend on the amount of time you have to prepare.

If you have 6 months +

1. Mow the plot
2. Water the area thoroughly
3. Roll out a silage tarp sandbags or stones to weigh down the edges and hold the tarp in place
4. Wait 6 months (or more)

If you need your area sooner

Best Option:

1. Plow or rototill the staked out area

Other Option:

1. Use a spade to cut the sod and peel it back.

<https://borntogrow.net/home-garden-course/planning-and-preparation/bed-preparation/>

Take a Soil Test

Whitmar McConnell is a great resource, especially if you consider yourself a beginner. You can also get your soil tested through your local state extension office. Visit one of the following websites for more instructions.

<https://vitalsoils.com.au/How-to-submit-a-soil-sample>

Or Search (your state) extension office soil samples

Please note - you will want to test your soil yearly for the first few years or until you get your soil well balanced.

<https://borntogrow.net/home-garden-course/soil-fertility/all-about-testing-your-soil/>

Amend the Soil

You will want to fertilize your garden based on your soil test. Specific minerals and amendments are available from a variety of sources. Some may be found at your local co-op. Others will need to be ordered. One good source is Seven Springs Fam Supply in VA.

<https://borntogrow.net/home-garden-course/soil-fertility/analyzing-and-amending-your-soil/>

Choosing your Crops and Ordering Seeds

Because you will be growing in the fall and winter, this is a great resource for choosing winter varieties,

<https://www.johnnyseeds.com/growers-library/vegetables/winter-growing-guide-recommended-crops-varieties.html>.

For those participants in areas that don't have a winter season you can choose any crop you want. Order your seeds as soon as possible! It can take a few weeks for your order to arrive.

If you are living in a climate where it gets cold during the winter, you will have to be especially particular about what crops you plant in your fall and winter garden. Johnny's Selected Seeds provides a wealth of information about what seeds will do well in cold weather, as well as when to plant them for best results.

Visit:

<https://www.johnnyseeds.com/growers-library/vegetables/winter-growing-guide-recommended-crops-varieties.html>

Be sure to order seeds well in advance as it can sometimes take a few weeks for orders to process and seeds to arrive!

<https://borntogrow.net/home-garden-course/planning-and-preparation/planning-my-garden/>

<https://borntogrow.net/home-garden-course/season-extension/its-all-about-timing/>

Making a Calendar

**Use the Seedtime App*

If for some reason you are unable to use the app, follow these instructions.

- 1) Find out when your last 10-hour day is by visiting www.timeanddate.com and entering the largest city closest to you.
- 2) Using the sliding scale for day length, find which day is your last day with 10 hours.
- 3) From this date you will use the chart on page 47 in Lesson 6. Counting backwards to the present day will tell you how many planting weeks you have after school starts.
- 4) Then compare the current week number to the chart, "Planting Time for Winter-Harvest Crops," on that same page.

<https://borntogrow.net/home-garden-course/planning-and-preparation/planning-my-garden/>

Building your cover (hoophouse, greenhouses, row covers)

One of your biggest challenges in winter growing will be keeping your cold temperatures and winds from killing your crops. Because the plants you are growing are cold-hardy, you don't have to keep the temperatures above freezing, but you do need to moderate extreme temperatures. There are several ways to do this.

Protection	Advantages	Disadvantages	Notes
Floating Row Cover	Relatively inexpensive and easy to use.	Can be challenging to keep in place in a windy location. You have to work in the elements, so class time becomes weather dependent.	Must weight down with sand bags every 5' around the edges. Can have value on it's own, but is indispensable when combined with hoophouse growing. See Appendix B for more information on managing row covers.

<p>Low Tunnels</p>	<p>See above. Also keeps covers from touching plants — which can prevent freeze damage to leaves.</p>	<p>See above. Can be easy to trip over when installed on the beds.</p>	<p>See above. Can be used with row cover or plastic or both. Use #9 ga. wire for hoops over individual beds or 1/2"x10' metal conduit with a bender to cover 2 beds at a time.</p>
<p>Caterpillar Tunnels</p>	<p>Walk-in protection from the elements. 1/3 the cost of a regular high tunnel. (Roughly \$1.25 sq. ft.) Will cover 4 beds. Can be fairly easily moved.</p>	<p>Can be awkward to work the outside beds. Not as sturdy as a more permanent high tunnel. Could be crowded for many students at one time.</p>	<p>A great “starter house” for winter protection.</p>
<p>Hoophouse/High Tunnel (Unheated)</p>	<p>Much nicer for a “classroom.” Students can work in the garden year-round — no matter what the weather!</p>	<p>More costly (roughly \$3.5 sq. ft. — if you build it yourself). More work to set up initially (but less ongoing work). May need to get building code approval — since it is considered a permanent structure</p>	<p>See Appendix C for more information on hoophouse size and design.</p>
<p>Heated Greenhouse</p>	<p>See above. Plus increased comfort and plant growth.</p>	<p>More initial and ongoing expense (can be \$7 sq. ft. or more for building). More energy intensive. May need building code approval.</p>	<p>Every school should work toward having at least one heated greenhouse for starting plants. For growing houses, thermostat should be kept just above freezing.</p>