



Program Guide

A Year in the School Garden

2025-2026

A resource for parents and teachers describing
themed gardens by grade, parent
responsibilities and garden team functions.



Introduction



This is a resource designed to provide an overview of the standards-based lessons to be taught in an outdoor classroom over the course of the school year. This resource provides an in-depth look at how real-world connections can be made to science, math and social studies in the outdoors.

How did the Outdoor Classroom start at TOW?

More than 150 lessons are taught at TOW outdoors each year. Our program brings together students, teachers, parents, administrators and community resources, with the common thread of people passionate about environmental education.

TOW has one of the oldest school garden programs in the county, with an active school garden program since the 1980s. From 2015-2020 the TOW PTA secured \$40,000 in grant funding and created many of the features you see today, such as fruit trees, the patio, greenhouse and theme gardens. In 2018, TOW Elementary was awarded the highest distinction of California Green Ribbon Schools (CA-GRS), the "Green Achiever" award, and was selected as a U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon School (ED-GRS). Strong PTA garden leadership, school district support, and community partnerships and/or funding from School Power, Laguna Beach Garden Club and the UC Master Gardeners continue to help the program and space flourish year after year.

Academic Lessons

There are six lessons for each grade. Each lesson is carefully designed per grade and linked to NGSS, CCSS or CA HSS standards, and match the sequencing of instruction over the year. They are taught during school hours in 45 minute periods, with groups of 20-30 students and 2-3 adults (garden educator, classroom or science teacher and parent volunteer). Lessons were developed in conjunction with teachers, science specialists, hundreds of volunteer parents and many garden friends. Over much trial and error, we found lessons that work well with our site, the rigorous standards, our Southern California seasons and the school year calendar.

Contacts – Garden Committee

TOW Principal Thomas Turner	Garden Teacher Kelly Osborne (949) 702-4522 kellyLosborne@gmail.com	PTA Garden Chair Amanda Swanson (480-798-3677), Lena Swinson (949-929-2633) & Melissa Fernandez Evans (305) 495-0263 garden@towpta.org
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Theme Gardens

An overview of what each grade level will grow for the year.

Kinder: Snacking Garden (IN KINDER YARD)

In kindergarten, parents determine what starters to plant in the kinder specific plot in their recess yard. Consider picking out plants that are easy to “snack-on-the-go”, like lettuce, snap peas, chives, kale, rainbow chard, or cherry tomatoes.

1st Grade: Edible Flowers Garden

Students start by planting cool season crops like peas, carrots and lettuce in the first lesson. In the second lesson, parents help plan and plant flowers in their Flower Garden space. In the spring, they plant potatoes, sunflowers and beans. They learn about snails, moon-based planting and seed saving.

*First grade parents maintain the **Flower Garden**.*

2nd Grade: Pollinator Garden

Students start with a square foot garden of radishes, beets, carrots and lettuce in the fall. In the second lesson, parents help plant pollinator-friendly plants with them. They learn about beneficial garden insects, composting, and seed saving.

*Second grade parents maintain the **Pollinator Garden**.*

3rd Grade: Roots & Shoots Garden

Students grow veggies on the main level, with an emphasis on propagation. They apply multiplication concepts, both working with arrays to start seeds in the greenhouse using seed trays. *Third grade parents maintain the **greenhouse and veggie beds**.*

4th Grade: California Grows! Garden

Students grow a California-themed garden of artichokes, strawberries, oranges and garlic that ties into social studies, learning what grows in different climate regions, gardens at the missions, and the history of the Navel orange. They juice fresh oranges and compete in a Salsa Competition during Fiesta Day.

*Fourth grade parents maintain the **artichoke slope and California native plants gardens**.*

5th Grade: Wellness Garden

In 5th grade, students and parents will grow and maintain the upper herbal “Wellness Garden”. They start in the fall with a scavenger hunt to learn some of the medicinal properties of plants. They have fun in the spring to develop smoothie recipes at the Smoothie Challenge and churn herb butter like pioneers during Pioneer Day.

Fifth grade parents maintain the **Wellness Garden and blackberries.**



GARDEN VOLUNTEER

◆ Sign Up & Help Our Garden Grow ◆

Imagine your child's eyes lighting up as they harvest the vegetables they planted with their own hands — that magic happens in our school garden, and we need you to help it grow! Whether you have a green thumb or are just garden-curious, your presence makes a huge difference!

Volunteer Commitment – 3 hours per month

- ✓ Mandatory Garden Training
Thursday, Sept 18th, 8-10AM
- ✓ Attend each monthly Green Thumb meeting, gardening with friendly parents
Fridays 8-10AM
- ✓ Attend 6 garden lessons, gardening with students to help maintain your grades themed area

Monthly Green Thumb Meetings: Save the Date!

OCT 3 | NOV 7 | DEC 5 | JAN 9 | FEB 13
MAR 6 | APR 10 | MAY 1 | JUNE 5

Questions? garden@towpta.org



The TOW Garden Theme Areas

As a volunteer, you won't be working alone—you'll be part of a fun, supportive team of parents from your child's grade, each group caring for a unique themed area of the garden. Together, you'll nurture these spaces:

1st Grade: Edible Flower Garden
2nd Grade: Pollinator Garden
3rd Grade: Fruit Orchard
4th Grade: CA Native Plants & Artichokes
5th Grade: Wellness & Herb Garden
K: Berry Patch

Volunteers will learn all about growing vegetables, get hands on practice pruning trees and discover beautiful herbs and flowers to grow at home!



Jobs

Kinder

- * Prep: Pull spent crops, weed, add soil, compost, fertilize to prep bed by kinder rooms.
- * Fall: Decide what to plant! (PTA reimburses you).
- * Let Kinder aide know the schedule for your visits
- * Winter: Prune apple tree
- * Spring: Pull everything in the plot.

1st Grade

- * Prep: Pull spent crops, weed, add soil, compost, fertilize to prep bed.
- * Fall: Inventory flower garden with your team and how to improve.
- * Students will help you plant your themed garden in Lesson #2
- * Throughout: Maintain theme garden (weed, trim, replant)

2nd Grade

- * Prep: Pull spent crops, weed, add soil, compost, fertilize to prep bed.
- * Fall: Inventory pollinator garden with team and determine how to improve
- * Students will help you plant your themed garden in Lesson #2
- * Throughout: Maintain theme garden (weed, trim, replant, remove pests),

3rd Grade – Greenhouse / Propagation / Roots & Shoots Garden

- * Fall: Start seeds in greenhouse (e.g. beets, rainbow chard, lettuce)
- * Throughout: Clean cobwebs from greenhouse, weed vegetable beds
- * Spring: Start tomato seeds in greenhouse

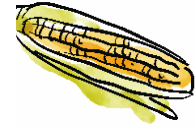
4th Grade – CA Natives / CA Grows! Garden

- * Prep: Weed slope and attend Love Laguna Day
- * Fall: help students plant artichokes, strawberries
- * Spring: Consider using artichokes for Farmers Markets
- * Summer: Cut artichokes to 3" above ground by June 1

5th Grade – Wellness Garden

- * Prep: Pull spent crops, weed, add soil, compost, fertilize to prep bed.
- * Fall: Prune back blackberry canes that fruited that year, inventory for improvements, make a list of herbs to replace as needed
- * Throughout: weed, prune, remove pests and keep mint contained

Key Garden Dates



Garden Volunteer Orientation

Sept. 18, 2024: 8:00-10:00 am * Mandatory for volunteers *

Volunteers receive program materials and hands-on training for a successful year gardening!

Green Thumb Meetings

Every 1st Friday of the month (unless otherwise noted), 8-10am, starting Sept. 18

Join the garden committee to get some gardening done: pruning, composting, repairs and planning. This is a great time to come and learn more about how to grow edible crops. This is also when we discuss our program, set goals and determine projects for the year.

Junior Master Gardeners

Cultivating leadership in the garden! The LBUSD Junior Master Gardener (JMG) program is a 10-week lunchtime and tutorial leadership opportunity where students learn hands-on skills in gardening, composting, harvesting, and environmental stewardship. Elementary sessions (grades 2-5) meet at lunch with a docent. Due to the leadership focus, elementary teachers may recommend one student per rotation (fall, winter, spring). [TOW DATES](#)

Special Events

*** Love Laguna Day - Saturday October 4, 2025: 8am**

This is a community-wide day of service where volunteers from across the community come to TOW to work on the garden.

*** Farmers Market - TBD**

The Farmers Market is an event where parents can sell herb bundles, handmade jams and other artisan items, inspired by the garden, to raise funds for the garden program.

*** Family Earth Day Event - Wed. April 22, 2026: 5:30-7:30pm**

This event will feature garden tours by JMGs, produce tasting, and a showcase of each grade's theme garden to the community.

*** Open Garden – Wed. 5/27/26**

The open garden is held on Open House night. We typically do healthy garden nosh and a Farmers Market at this event before classrooms open.



Garden Volunteers

PTA Garden Chair Role/Responsibilities

The Garden Chair is responsible for these tasks:

- Develop and manage garden budget within overall PTA budget (May/June)
 - o Typical expenses: \$4,000 for garden supplies + \$2,000 for Open garden
- Create garden schedule for year (May-August)
 - o Volunteer Orientation
 - o Green Thumb Meetings (signup.com, monthly)
 - o Outdoor Classroom Lesson Schedule (with garden teacher and school)
 - o Junior Master Gardener Club
- Develop volunteer base (Sept)
 - o Share expectations for garden parents
 - o Create contact list of garden parents, 1-2 per class (for teachers to fill in)
 - o Host volunteer training in early Fall for garden parents
 - o Find garden *coordinators*
 - o Thank volunteers!
- Communicate garden events over year (Aug-May)
 - o Dolphin Digest – pictures and blurbs
 - o PTA Meeting Updates – verbal updates
 - o Insta / Canva – create & share images for each Green Thumb
 - o Email - garden volunteers regular updates 2x month and signup links

25-26 Project Leads

- Love Laguna - Amanda & Lori
- Farmer's Markets - TBD
- Earth Day - TBD
- Open Garden - Melissa

Garden Project Leads

Farmers Market Coordinator



The farmers market coordinator helps plan and execute various farmers market events over the school year. These events raise money for the school garden program, help return healthy foods back into the school community and promote family wellness.

- * Arrange dates for school farmers markets using the calendar of known events such as Back-to-School night, Living Museum (3rd), Holiday Boutique (5th), Thanksgiving Play (K), school performances or school-wide events.
- * Communicate date and times of markets
- * Arrange to pick up fresh produce from garden
- * Arrange for handmade goods from parents, students, local businesses
- * Set up tables, displays, signs, host table
- * Take payments with cash box (bring change) & PayPal
- * Deposit money following PTA procedures

Parent Volunteers

The Volunteers are parents or caretakers that help make sure our program is successful! Typically each class has 2-3 parent volunteer minimums that wish to help in the garden. The Garden Chairs will work with those parents from each class in their child's grade to ensure things grow well. We have one of the largest and most robust school gardens in the county and it takes a team to manage it! We have split up the responsibilities of our entire garden by grade to make it easier for each volunteer to help sustain our program.

The Garden Volunteers main job is to ensure the three responsibilities of the grade level are met:

1. Attend each of the 9 Green Thumb Meetings (working with adults)– see *schedule*
2. Care for their Grade's Assigned Theme Area – see *Overview*
3. Attend the 6 Academic Lessons (working with kids)

What's Growing at TOW?

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES	
Fruit Orchard Apple (3) Persimmon (2) Pomegranate (2) Eureka Lemon Mexican Lime (2) Navel Orange (3) Valencia Orange Mandarin Orange (4) Peach (2) Apricot (2) Strawberry (1) & Pineapple Guava (2) Avocado (1) Fig Elderberry Olive Passionfruit Blueberry	Veggie Beds (Annuals) - 3RD GRADE <i>Cool Season ...</i> Radish Carrots Snap Pea Lettuce Beets Rainbow Chard Onions Kale Argula <i>Warm Season ...</i> Cucumber Pumpkin Squash Cherry Tomato Cucamelon
1ST AND 2ND GRADE	
Pollinator Garden (2nd Grade) Mexican bush sage (tall velvety purple flower) Blue passionflower vine (orange fruit) Trumpet vine (white, purple) Baby sage 'hotlips' (red flower) Popcorn cassia (yellow flower) Common rue (yellow flower) Mexican sunflower tithonia (orange-red) Milkweed Red Buckwheat Pincushion Scabiosa (rounded purple) Blanket flower -Gallardia mesa red (dark red) Deerweed (yellow-orange small) Lamb's ear Basils (e.g. African blue basil) Golden currant	Edible Flowers (1st Grade) Lavender (perennial around greenhouse) Nasturtium (self seeding annual, returns) Calendula (self seeding, returns each year) Feverfew (self seeding, returns each year) Strawberry (perennial, replant runners) Need planting Fall - Violas Pansy Borage Snapdragons Spring - Sunflowers

4TH GRADE - CA GROWS! GARDEN	
Native Plants Garden <i>Outside fence</i> Matijilla Poppy White Sage California Sagebrush Desert Mallow Narrowleaf Milkweed California Poppy (annual seeding needed) <i>Around Patio/Steps</i> Toyon Blue Elderberry Beach Strawberry Canyon Prince Wild Rye Ceanothus Cleveland Sage	Artichoke Slope Artichokes!!! Strawberry California Bay Laurel Pink Yarrow Red Monkeyflower Cinnamon Geranium Jerusalem sage
5TH GRADE - WELLNESS GARDEN	
Herbs Spearmint & peppermint Lemongrass Lemon verbena Chives Thyme, oregano, rosemary, sage Fennel Pineapple sage Horseradish Mexican lime tree Passionfruit vine Thornless Blackberry Jerusalem artichoke (needs replanting) Echinecea	Succulent Slope Saucer plant - Aeonium urbicum Echeveria prolifica (very small one) Hen & chicks - Sempervivum Dwarf blue Chalksticks - Senecio serpens Foxtail agave - Agave attenuate Flapjacks - Kalanchoe thyrsiflora (red/green) Kalanchoe stonecrops- (pink)

