School Garden Site Checklist

Theresa Badurek, UF/IFAS Extension, Pinellas County

School gardens are an increasingly popular tool for teaching kids everything from math to nutrition. For the greatest chance of success with a school garden one must first begin with a well-chosen site. **Here is a checklist of items to identify when locating a site for a school vegetable garden:**

PHOTO: **UF/IFAS EXTENSION, PINELLAS COUNTY**

- Check to see if anyone else in your school might utilize the garden and plan with them.

- Make sure the space is not already set-aside for another use.

- Choose a location that is visible from classrooms or other active buildings.

- Select an area that receives full sun all day, or a minimum of 6-8 hours. Take into account shade patterns of trees, buildings, awnings, etc.

- Choose a location near a potable water source: the closer it is the easier gardening will be.

- Select an area with well-drained soil where water does not sit after rainfall or irrigation.

- Plan for storage. Your garden site should:

    - be close enough to the classroom or existing storage/maintenance area so it will not be a chore to carry tools to the garden with the students, or

    - provide secure storage near the garden for necessary items such as tools, wheelbarrows, etc.

- Locate garden away from trees: trees roots will compete with your vegetable garden for water and nutrients and cast shade on your garden. More than 60 feet away from the outer edge of a mature tree canopy is ideal, if possible. Remember to take the mature size of any younger trees nearby into account.

- Pick a site where activities and sports will not send a stray ball or student into the growing area and damage the plants or injure the student.

(Continued on reverse…)

⌗ Choose a spot near an appropriate area for composting- an area protected from drying winds, where it can be reached with a hose, and in a shaded area if possible.

PHOTO: UF/IFAS ONLINE COMPOSTING CENTER

⌗ Select an area free from weeds or that can be kept weed-free.

⌗ Plan for a system to isolate the garden from wildlife (fencing, bird-netting, etc.) if necessary.

⌗ Test soil for potential contaminants like lead or other heavy metals if planting directly in the ground. If soil is contaminated you will need to plant in raised beds or containers filled with growing media brought in from off site. Raised beds are usually better anyway because of our poor soils. These tests are available through private laboratories who charge fees (often expensive), so plan for this in your budget. Two local examples for Pinellas County include (not meant as an endorsement, just for reference purposes):

- Southern Analytical Lab, http://www.southernanalyticallabs.com/
- Constellation Technology, http://www.contech.com/index.htm

If these steps are followed your school garden will be off to a great start! For more information about school gardens please contact us:

Theresa Badurek
UF/IFAS Urban Horticulture Extension Agent, Pinellas County
tbadurek@pinellascounty.org

Bob Albanese
School and Community Garden Coordinator and Horticulture Program Assistant
ralbanese@pinellascounty.org