

# School Garden Lessons Learned:

## An Extension Educator's Guide

## Urban Horticulture

[www.pinellascountyextension.org](http://www.pinellascountyextension.org)

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**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, faculty, staff and volunteers will benefit from the following lessons learned when working with a school garden:**



PHOTO: [HTTP://ICS.IFAS.UFL.EDU](http://ics.ifas.ufl.edu)

### How to communicate with school board employees:



- Contact their communications or human resources to see how they prefer you reach faculty, staff, administration, volunteers, etc.; do not just email from addresses found online.
- Teachers are not available much of the day but often have some planning time at the end of the day to talk or email. Try to be available during those hours. Consult local schools to find out their schedules.

### Visiting schools in light of increased school security measures:



- Always sign in at the office, even if you become a “regular”.
- Be prepared to show photo ID at the office.
- Make sure all volunteers such as Master Gardeners understand this.
- Wearing a nametag identifying your connection to Extension is helpful, puts people at ease, and helps them remember your name.

### Aligning outreach with school and test scheduling:



- Many school systems have calendars online but testing schedules may not be so available.
- Some tests are countywide on certain schedules, and others may have some flexibility within a school, grade, etc. Contact specific school contact person to make sure you are not interrupting these.
- You (or your volunteers) may not be able to access the school or garden on certain testing or training days so plan ahead.

(Continued on reverse...)

### **Coaching school staff on the time and resource requirements for a successful school garden:**



- Be prepared to meet on site with them (or send a Master Gardener) to help them locate an appropriate site. We created a school garden site checklist available at [http://pinellas.ifas.ufl.edu/home\\_landscape/documents/School\\_Garden\\_Checklist.pdf](http://pinellas.ifas.ufl.edu/home_landscape/documents/School_Garden_Checklist.pdf) to simplify this.
- Be accessible by phone and email when questions arise.
- Create a school garden “kit” or videos they can refer to on their own time.
- Hold a school garden summer camp training and provide CEUs for teachers.
- Help them to understand the importance of creating an institutional garden with a succession plan for when teachers, volunteers, and students move on.

### **Manage the schools’ expectation of what Extension can provide (education, resources, volunteer support) as well as what we cannot provide (labor, free plants, free curriculum materials):**



- Explain or list early in an email, on your website, etc. what you can provide.
- Explain that you have evaluation, survey, and reporting requirements that you may ask them to participate in.
- Always introduce your Master Gardener volunteers as educators or consultants, not as free laborers.

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

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