



Back-to-School Garden Readiness

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Schools are beaming with activities and routines after the summer break. Is your school garden ready to welcome back students to the new school year? School gardens have always remained a favorite place for all children at school. Children love to learn outdoors, not just science lessons, but also art, literature and math. Is your school garden ready to support and nourish your students' curiosity to learn and explore?



During summer, gardens respond vigorously to all the elements—sunlight, temperature, water and soil nutrients—and undergo rapid transformations. Each school garden may have undergone its unique transformation during the summer break. While some schools, with well-established systems to manage their gardens, appear lush with fruits, flowers and vegetables, ready for children to harvest; others may either appear dry and dead, or look like overgrown jungles.

Before schools reopen, garden educators, start planning the garden curriculum and activities for different classes. School garden clubs that were inactive during summer break, start looking for new ideas, and seek advice to get their gardens up and running. Many schools reach out to local UC Master Gardener volunteers for consultation.

Here is a Back-To-School Garden Readiness Checklist to help you get your school gardens ready:

- Start with a school garden site assessment** - Do you have the area covered with dried, dead plants and weeds? Do you have overgrown plants and trees that need pruning? Looks at the school garden site and list everything what needs improvement.
- Consult** - Invite your local UC Master Gardener, for a free site consultation. They can provide helpful insights and advice.
- Clean the garden** - Pull out all the weeds, along with their roots. Prune back all overgrown plants, including trees. Remove all dead plant materials from your school garden site.
- Compost & Mulch** - Before you start planting, put a layer of organic compost to enrich the soil. Cover all exposed soil surface with a thick layer of mulch, to suppress growth of weeds.
- Irrigation** - Inspect your irrigation system to detect anything that may need fixing or changing.
- Harvest** - If you had a thriving school garden all through summer, it is now time to plan a harvest party, or a seed collection and labeling activity for your students.
- Select Plants for Fall/Winter** - Involve students to plan fall planting activities, select cool season crops suitable for your area. Introduce cool season cover crops and discuss their benefits.
- Secure Seedlings for Planting** - Work with local gardeners, garden nurseries and stores, to secure fall seedlings for your school garden.
- Funding & Donations** - Remember to tap into funding and resources in the beginning of the school year from your Parent Faculty Committee (PFC), and through other community donation programs.
- Outreach** - Talk about your school garden at back-to-school night. Create a wishlist and ask for specific donations for your school garden.
- Recruit Volunteers** for all garden activities.

A Back-To-School Garden Readiness checklist helps to make a thorough assessment of the condition of your school garden site, and identify areas where the garden needs most improvement. It helps to secure funding and organise school garden activities for the entire school year.