

Tips for Designing your Garden

Design Plan

Take the ideas of students, teachers and parents and draw a design plan that incorporates everyone's vision. Dream big. Start small. Consider developing a three year plan, adding a few components each year. What are the main priorities this year? Map out where you want each element to be placed on the design plan.

Possible elements to include in the garden/outdoor classroom design plan

Recommended for Year 1:

- Garden beds: raised, in the ground, containers
- Community growing areas: herbs, flowers, market gardens, popcorn, pumpkins
- Digging Bed / Demonstration Bed
- Outdoor classroom seating: straw bale, tree stumps, benches
- Compost area: worm bins, three bin systems, hot piles, cold piles
- Walkways and paths - at least three feet wide
- Work space: picnic tables, benches, tables
- Tool shed or storage area with a tool cleaning area
- Fencing, if needed

Recommended for Year 2:

- Drip Irrigation
- Trellis
- Mural / sculpture
- Greenhouse or cold frames
- Outdoor kitchen and/or sinks
- Signage
- Outdoor bulletin board
- Habitat gardens: hummingbirds, butterflies, beneficial insects
- Native / medicinal garden
- Orchard
- Berry patches

Recommended for Year 3 and Beyond:

- Special Projects area
- Water Feature: solar pond, bird bath
- Cob structures

Building Materials for Garden Elements

- Raised Beds: reclaimed lumber, bend-a-board, broken concrete, plastic lumber / Trex, cinder blocks, mounding dirt
- Container Gardens: wine barrels, bathtubs, sinks
- Outdoor Classroom Seating Areas: straw bales, tree stumps, reclaimed lumber, cob
- Pathways: woodchips, gravel, stepping stones, recycled concrete / urbanite

Things to think about

- Where is PE? What activities take place around your garden area?
- Where is recess?
- Where is water located? Is it accessible from the garden?
- Are there areas of the garden that flood? Are there drainage issues?
- What elements are already in the area? Trees? Picnic tables? Benches?
- Does your Principal have an idea about where the garden should be?
- Is the garden in a courtyard? If so, how will it affect surrounding classrooms? Is there a challenge with shading?
- Is your garden in a field? If so, how will you access water? Do you need a fence to deter vandalism or delineate from other activities?
- Is there grass in your garden? If so, how will you keep the grass mowed or mulched?
- Is your garden accessible to a large truck for deliveries of soil, mulch, etc?
- Will the garden be easy to maintain or require a lot of on-going maintenance?
- If you are creating an outdoor learning area, be sure that distractions are behind the students. To ensure optimal attention, have the seating arrangement face students away from the sun; the teacher can wear a hat and face the sun.
- Pathways should be at least 3 feet apart.
- Be sure the width of your garden beds allows students to plant in the center. 3-4' wide beds are best. Otherwise, you won't be able to maximize the growing space.