DigBits

Selections from DigThis newsletter

School gardening #1

DIG Durham Integrated Growers FOR A SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY

Gardening and schools: a natural fit

As DIG's new school liaison, it is my job to reach out to teachers, administrators and parents of the Durham District School Board (DDSB, & the Durham Catholic District School Board (DCDSB), to help them with their garden and urban agriculture projects. It's a tall order, but fortunately as a teacher with the DDSB, I have an insider's perspective when it comes to gardening in a school setting. To get the ball rolling and to convince stakeholders to start or continue maintaining a garden or food project at their school, here is a top ten list of the benefits, in no particular order.

1 Children of all ages **love** playing in the dirt.

2 Gardening brings out a child's natural curiosity.

3 Gardening during recess gives students something to do.

4 Gardening at school gives the non-athletes something they can excel in.

5 Gardening is the perfect springboard to teaching a variety of science units, including grade 6 Biodiversity, grade 4 Habitats & Communities, grade 3 Plants & Soils, and grade 1 Living Things, not to mention inquiry-based learning in kindergarten.

6 High school students learn entrepreneurial skills when they are in charge of managing community gardens, aquaculture tanks, and school yard design projects

7 High school students can receive volunteer hours that go towards their diploma when involved in gardening projects.

8 High school teachers can easily fit school gardening within the grades 11 & 12 Biology curriculum ("greening their school grounds").

9 Parent engagement increases when schools undertake community garden projects. Parents and students are invited to maintain gardens over the summer, and can "reap what they sow" during harvest time.

10 Growing food at school teaches students self-sufficiency, food security, and healthy living skills and provides them with the opportunity to try nutrient-dense local foods.

My winter newsletter article will delve deeper into curriculum specifics focusing on grades 3, 4, and 6, with real-life examples from my own classroom.

Planning a school garden

Last season's article focused on the benefits of gardening with students. This month, we will briefly explore how to begin a school-based community garden.

First things first, it's important to obtain Administrator (Principal) approval. Before your meeting, you should probably have a list of objectives, including how you will incorporate the gardening into your teaching. If you are a parent, present a few simple ways teachers can embed gardening into their practice (easiest to do with the grade 3 Science curriculum). After approval, try to attend a School Community Council (S.C.C.) meeting to secure funding, and to recruit parents to help with labour and future maintenance. This new-found support network will really help your garden project take flight.

Next, look online for organizations willing to support school-based projects. Desjardins has an easy grant application process, as does Farm to Cafeteria Canada. Whole Kids Foundation's grant application process is a bit more involved, but the funds available are higher.

Within the school, begin recruiting students to your garden club. Kids in grades 1 to 6 are often the most eager members, since they are innately drawn to playing in the dirt. Inviting students into the decision-making process won't make your life easier, but the rewards are endless. We are doing this for the kids, after all.

Next season's article will delve deeper into the planning and planting phases of your garden. Best of luck!

continued on reverse

Layouts for a school garden

Our Winter season's article focused on the early planning stages of a school garden. This month, we will explore how to plan a school-based community garden, following a simple, structured, and time-honoured method. Interestingly, this technique, called The Square Foot Garden, is suitable for all garden types!

Pioneered by Mel Bartholomew, square foot gardening is a technique that became popular for those who seek order and control. It may seem like you'd be going against the grain by implementing this technique with children, however, square foot gardening reinforces a child's innate desire for rules and routines; once you apply the formula, kids can follow the "recipe" and are almost guaranteed success.

According to Don't Waste The Crumbs.com, "You divide your space into square feet and plant a certain amount of plants (depending on the size of the plant) within each square foot." As an example, since bell peppers grow up and out, you would plant 1 per square; meanwhile, carrots grow up and down, therefore you can plant 16 per square (https://dontwastethecrumbs.com/).

You may be asking yourself, "we're in Canada, so why on Earth would we measure in square feet?" We leave it to our friends, the Aussies, to help us out with the conversions. Your raised planter would therefore be 1.2 metres by 1.2 metres, and your square foot plot within the garden would measure 30 centimetres by 30 centimetres.

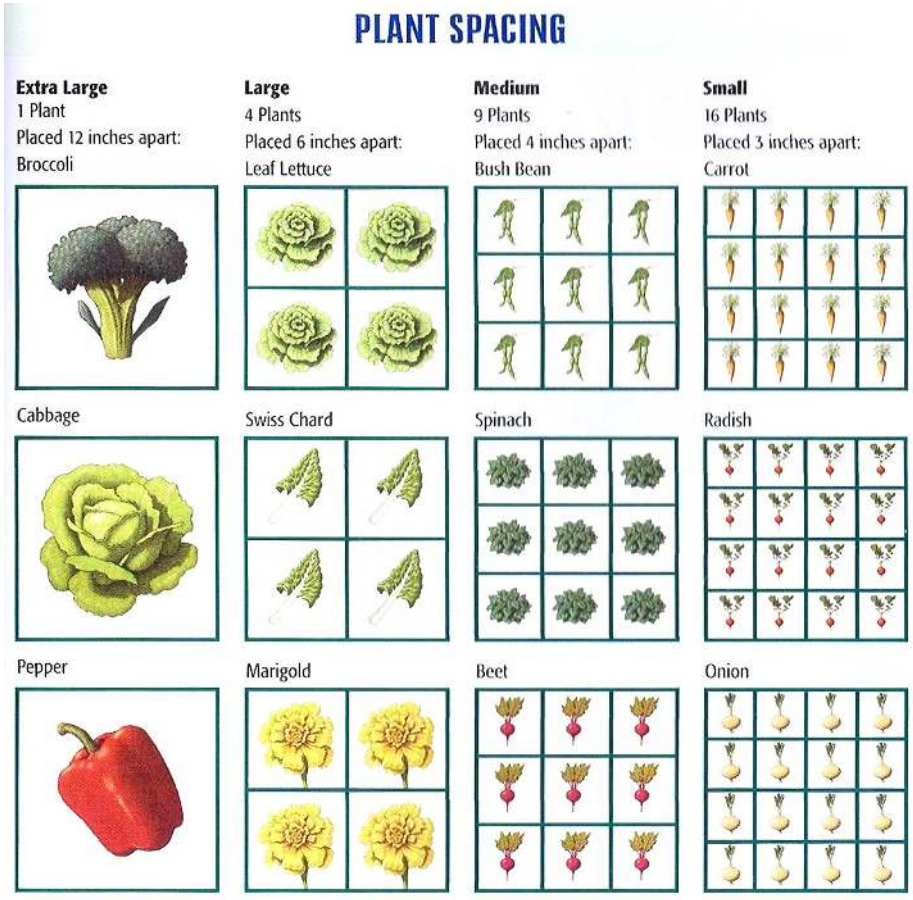
Once your planter is prepped with the best soil you can get your hands on, pull out the measuring tape, start at one end, and mark off 11 inches. Hammer a nail in, and repeat, until you reach the end. Continue measuring along all sides until you reach the beginning. Finally, tie your twine to the nail and pull it across to the opposite nail, tying it there, to create a line. Repeat until you are left with a grid system resembling this:

As you begin planting, you will need to know how many plants fit in each square.

See chart below.

As we always say here at DIG, start small, and see where life takes you! If you find success with one raised planter, expand gradually, as it's easier to scale up. To conclude, here is an important resource to help inform your practice:

http://www.melbartholomew.com/all-the-basics-of-square-foot-gardening/



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