

## **HELPING SCHOOLS IN MAKING A GARDEN**

### **ONE OR TWO POINTS THAT MIGHT HELP BEFORE YOU START.**

WHO IS IT FOR AND FOR WHAT USE? To enhance the grounds? To use as a teaching resource? To provide shade or a quiet area for story time? Sensory garden? To have a seated area for parents when collecting? Permanent planting or annuals? Flowers or Vegetables?

WHO WILL MAINTAIN IT? This obviously is one of the most important points. The children? If so how and when? After school or during breaks, once a week, all the year? As a club or just for everyone? Parents and Staff? If so how and when? What will happen during the summer holidays? Any vandalism problems? Any garden clubs or allotment societies nearby who might help? Are neighbours able to help with security, good idea to involve them? If you have a contractor then inform them if you are changing the plan and therefore their contract as there maybe areas that you do not want them to touch.

CHOOSING A SITE. It is best in the sun, without overhanging trees away from ball games but somewhere that can be seen so it can be worked on at break or dinner times. Raised beds are very good as they are safe from balls and boots as well as not allowing grass or weeds to invade or if you only have a tarmac site. Your garden needs to be near a tap and a loo! Start small as if it runs amok it can be so depressing. It is so easy to make a larger plot if it is a success. Try to get the children involved at every stage of the planning, in the design of the plot, in the choice plants and use their ideas. Some schools only have containers which are fine if kept watered and can be moved around with ease and if small, can be taken home in the holidays. If deciding on chequer board plots, make them large enough to dig but small enough to reach.

Funding. This can be a real problem and needs sorting out at the start. There are many grants available, some from large national companies and others from local businesses like super markets or garden centres. Seed companies have gifts. Some water companies will help with water features. All need a written request and letters are better from the children with plans and drawings. They all need to know how you are going to maintain the site. Try the many web sites available including the Royal Horticultural Society and the government teachernet/growing schools. Once up and running it can be self funding with plants, veg, painted pots, homemade garden items etc. being sold at the school fete, sports day or local market.

TOOLS. These need to be of the correct size and of a sturdy make. Bulldog Tools and Joseph Bentley Tools have a good selection. Children have to be shown how to work with them and carry them safely. It is best to have enough for everyone, as standing around without is very demoralising. Plastic juice containers make good watering cans with their lids pierced and are light when full. There needs to be safe storage somewhere. Water butts and compost bins are useful and educational in their use. Do not forget wheelbarrows or buckets for waste.

STARTING. Check the soil, make a survey as a task, what is the aspect and how is the drainage? Wet or dry? Are there existing plants , overhanging

trees? If the ground has not been used before then heavy digging might be in order. A working party could be organised. Topsoil is essential for good gardening and many new schools have very compacted areas which will need more soil and plenty of compost. Planting potatoes for the first year helps to clean the ground. If the site very hard ground or tarmac, then raised borders are fine as long as they are large enough and deep enough to avoid drying out. Try different shapes, squares, circles, diamonds etc. Do not forget the drainage at the base. Benches around large planters are very good as seats and can be used as kneeling boards.

Plants. The choice depends on how you want to use it. A mixed flower and Vegetable plot can be fun. Many veg have pretty flowers and growing habit. The children love growing vegetables for the school to enjoy. Salad crops are the best and are very easy. Herbs are another idea with a sensory garden being a good classroom. Different coloured or shaped leaves make interest. If vegetables, then try to start them early or think of late ones like root vegetables or squashes. It is a good way of encouraging healthy eating and maybe a salad or soup day might be an idea?

HERITAGE. Make your garden unique by including some local history. There is natural heritage with native trees, meadows, hedges and plants. Built heritage such as local stone, brick, cobbles, metal or other works. Unusual designs in gates, latches or memorials could all be included in your designs. Local traditions such as festivals, customs or famous people can be reflected. Have you any archaeological evidence to look at? Industrial items to find? Use your museum, library or heritage centre to give some ideas. Keep written diaries, photographs and drawings of your works as you are making your own history!

PLANNING AHEAD. It is worth thinking how the garden or garden plots are to be worked. If it is to be a garden club - will it be everyone together, two to a plot, a group or individuals? Some do well with two different year groups. Others move 'up' a plot each year. Are there to be permanent features in these gardens as stone statues, trees, seats etc? It is important that someone is 'in charge' as gardens can get totally over grown in a summer. Is there a caretaker? Are there people in the community who would like to help? Police checks are not needed with some charities and certainly not when there is a teacher present.

BENEFITS. These are many. Children who feel uncomfortable or non achievers inside can blossom in their gardens. Difficult behaviour can improve. Teaching the curriculum on all subjects is possible. Quiet sites for reading and story time, shade for seating, and a peaceful place for those who hate the playground. Healthy eating and keeping fit, the two go together. Do not forget whom the garden is for, so get them involved from the beginning. Ofsted have now acknowledged grounds as a very important part of schools. The Healthy Schools Programme is now promoting growing clubs and has a co-ordinator in your Local Education Authority who would like to know of your plans. There may be a County Wildlife Trust or other organisations that would work with you. We need good horticulturists for the future of our green spaces.

DO NOT TAKE 'NO' FOR AN ANSWER. GIVE IT A WHIRL AND GOOD LUCK!