



Garden Calendar

Having a calendar of garden tasks throughout the year supports sustainable garden management and allows volunteers to plug in anytime.



FIGURE 6-1. There are gardening tasks all throughout the year.

GARDEN MAINTENANCE TIMELINE

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Managing the school garden can be simple with a plan in place for monthly tasks and the volunteers to support getting it all done.

AUGUST

PLANTING

- This is the sweet spot for planting late crops of summer (warm season) plants, and early crops of fall (cool season) plants! Between August 1-September 15, many things can go into the ground to be harvested before the first frost in mid-October. For more details, refer to a North Carolina Planting Guide.

TENDING

- No need to reinvent the wheel. Have a call and response you use to recenter the class? Use it! Have a method for picking helpers or determining order? Use it! The continuity between inside and outside will help the students remember that they are here to have fun AND learn.

HARVESTING

- Harvest crops on a regular basis for season-long production.
- Ripe tomatoes can be harvested at any time.
- Colored peppers can be harvested either green or ripe.
- Cucumbers and squash must be harvested every two or three days or they will become too tough to use and will stop producing.
- Melons turn yellowish and often slip off the stem when ripe; watermelons are

ripe when the tendril at the base of the stem (where it meets the vine) turns brown.

- Potatoes should be dug once the plants have died back.
- Winter squash, pumpkins, and gourds should be harvested once the vines have died but before hard frosts (30°F or lower) damage the fruit.

PLAN AHEAD

- Set up and meet with a garden committee and make a plan for the year
- Schedule workdays and community events. Who will be responsible for garden chores? What will happen to the harvest? What goals do you have for the space?
- How often will you meet as a group? (Monthly, every quarter, as needed?)
- Identify grants early. Many grants for gardens are due October-February.
- Take a soil sample and send it in to Raleigh so you can make needed soil amendments this fall. Soil sample boxes and instructions are available for free at NC Cooperative Extension.



FIGURE 6-2. Strawberry plants can be planted in the fall for a spring harvest.



FIGURE 6-3. A compost bin is a simple strategy for turning garden waste into a soil amendment for the garden.

SEPTEMBER

PLANTING

- This is the sweet spot for planting late crops of summer (warm season) plants, and early crops of fall (cool season) plants! Between August 1-September 15, many things can go into the ground to be harvested before the first frost in mid-October. For more details, refer to a Central North Carolina Planting Guide.
- Plant strawberry transplants to eat next spring, Figure 6-2. If you have an established strawberry patch, this is a good time to thin it and share the plants!

TENDING

- Bug patrol – keep a close eye on the vegetables. Insects and diseases are more severe this time of year.

- Strawberries: fertilize strawberry beds with 1-2 pounds of 33-0-0 (all nitrogen) per 100 foot row, and keep beds watered during September and October.
- Clean up garden areas to reduce insects and disease as plants die back for winter

HARVEST

- Harvest pumpkins when flesh is completely orange and avoid carrying by stems.
- Pick apples and pears.

PLAN AHEAD

- Write and submit grants for the garden.

OCTOBER

PLANTING

- Plant cloves of garlic in the garden for a late spring harvest.
- Plant onion sets for a spring harvest of onion bulbs.

TENDING

- Established gardens should be cleaned up before the first snow. This can be done any time in the fall. Pull all dead plant material and compost if an official compost pile has been established at your school. If not, simply pile all refuse in an out-of-the-way corner of the garden. Eventually the humus that results can be incorporated into the garden.

HARVEST

- Harvest any greens like lettuce, spinach, chard, and kale.

PLAN AHEAD

- Write and submit grants for the garden.
- New gardens should also be broken in during the fall. Since most will be placed on what was once lawn, sod should ideally be tilled under when the ground is moist (not soggy) at least once in the fall and once or twice in spring.





FIGURE 6-4. Late fall harvests of greens are tasty and fun.



FIGURE 6-5. Mulching with leaf mulch or straw minimizes weeds throughout the growing season.

NOVEMBER

PLANTING

- Garlic!
- In a cold frame: lettuce and other hardy vegetables like beets, cabbage, spinach, carrots, and collard greens. This will keep them warmer and growing longer during the winter.
- Trees and shrubs! Prepare the site by loosening the soil well beyond the drip line of each plant (where the rain falls off the leaves). Plant at depths grown in nursery or slightly higher.

TENDING

- Vegetables: remove dead vegetable plants. Turn over the soil in the garden beds to expose the insects to the winter cold - this will kill many of them off. This is the time to add any finished compost,

and any soil amendments that are recommended from your soil test results.

- Strawberries: mulch around plants with straw to prepare for winter.
- Raspberries and blackberries: prune off older canes.
- Clean all garden tools before putting away for the winter. Inventory supplies, and note anything that needs to be replaced or added.
- Store excess or harvested garden seeds in an airtight container with a small packet of dry milk. The dry milk removes excess moisture.

HARVEST

- Harvest any greens like lettuce, spinach, chard, and kale.
- Cut heads of broccoli and cauliflower.

PLAN AHEAD

- Write and submit grants for the garden.

DECEMBER

TENDING

- Strawberries: put pine needles or straw over your strawberries.
- Pull any cool season weeds that have sprouted.

HARVEST

- Harvest any greens like lettuce, spinach, chard, beet greens, mustard and turnip greens, and kale.

PLAN AHEAD

- Choose crops and varieties for spring planting, keeping in mind what students

and teachers would like to plant and which crops food service personnel are willing and able to use.

- Obtain seeds, ensuring that the varieties are suitable for this growing zone by checking time to maturity in catalogues, or by using knowledgeable sources like your local Cooperative Extension office.
- Design garden layout, paying particular attention to the space needs of the various crops. (See Planting Guide for details.)
- Plan indoor locations for seed-starting and growing where maximum light is available. This may not be possible in every classroom, so if sufficiently sunny windows are not available, consider investing in grow-lights or a greenhouse.
- Write and submit grants for the garden.



FIGURE 6-6. Seedlings can be started on a windowsill in late winter..



FIGURE 6-7. Using hoops and rowcovers can extend the season in a school garden.

JANUARY

PLANTING

- Start seedlings indoors: broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, collards, lettuce, onion, and herbs.

TENDING

- Soil test: to make sure the pH is adjusted before your spring planting. Soil tests between Thanksgiving and April 1 are \$4.
- If we have a warm day: pull out any weeds that are growing in the garden before they set seed.
- Review Planting Guide: Develop a planting schedule for the crops your school has chosen to grow. Timing is very important for producing transplants strong enough to plant outside. Take inventory of what supplies you have on-hand and procure materials such

as potting soil, containers, label sticks, and watering tools that will be needed throughout the spring.

PLAN AHEAD

- Choose crops and varieties for spring planting, keeping in mind what students and teachers would like to plant and which crops food service personnel are willing and able to use.
- Obtain seeds, ensuring that the varieties are suitable for this growing zone by checking time to maturity in catalogues, or by using knowledgeable sources like your local Cooperative Extension Office.
- Design the garden layout, paying particular attention to the space needs of the various crops. (See Planting Guide for details.)
- Write and submit grants for the garden.

FEBRUARY

PLANTING

- Start indoors: tomatoes and peppers.
- Directly seed outside: English peas and sugar snap peas.

TENDING

- Check Plants Regularly: Indoor plants should be checked daily to ensure adequate thinning, watering, and light are being provided.
- Soil test: to make sure the pH is adjusted before your spring planting. Soil tests between Thanksgiving and April 1 are \$4.
- Clean and repair garden tools.

PLAN AHEAD

- Design the garden layout, paying particular attention to the space needs of the various crops. (See Planting Guide for details.)
- Plan a Spring Planting day for March. Planting ideally will involve as many students as possible. Establish groups of students (10-12 suggested) and adult helpers (one per group) to plant in shifts. Larger groups can be tough to coordinate; small groups are recommended.
- Write and submit grants for the garden.

MARCH

PLANTING

- Start indoors: tender annual flowers like marigolds, zinnias, and petunias; tomatoes, peppers, and other warm season vegetables.
- Hold a Spring Planting Day to get spring (cool season) seeds in the ground.
- You can plant cool season plants outdoors: potatoes, peas, onion, lettuce and salad greens, collards and hardy greens, broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, and radishes.

TENDING

- Prepare garden bed soil for planting – but wait until soil is dry enough to be worked.
- Add wood chips to paths and around garden beds.
- Hand pull winter weeds like henbit and common chickweed.

PLAN AHEAD

- Start summer (warm season) plants indoors from seed in early March.



FIGURE 6-8. Carrots, beets, turnips, and radish seedlings all should be thinned.



FIGURE 6-9. A trellis can be a space saver in the garden and allow for easy harvesting.

APRIL

PLANTING

- Start inside: cucumber, summer squash, and melon.
- Plant outside: After the danger of frost has passed, tomatoes, peppers, and herbs can be transplanted outside. In late spring, you can try an early planting of green beans, cucumber, summer squash, and sweet corn.

TENDING

- Thin out crowded seedlings from early plantings of cool season crops like beets, carrots, lettuce, onion, and radish. You can eat these!
- Set up a rain gauge in the garden, to record rainfall. Most gardens need about 1-inch of water every week. If there isn't enough rain, someone will have to water.

HARVESTING

- Pick salad greens, kale, mustard greens, green onions, beets, peas, herbs, and radishes.

PLAN AHEAD

- Begin to seek volunteers for summer garden maintenance. One option is to have families adopt a week. Plan a few garden orientation meetings for these families prior to summer.
- Plan a Summer Planting day for late May – early June. Planting ideally will involve as many students and/or families as possible.

MAY

PLANTING

- Hold a Summer Planting Day!
- All summer (warm season) plants can be set out now. Plant another crop of green beans for a late season crop

TENDING

- If garden space is limited, set up trellises and supports so that vining crops like cucumbers, tomatoes, and beans can grow up!
- Keep vegetables watered well.
- Add leaf mulch to garden beds 1-3 inches deep around plants.
- Look out for squash vine borer. You can often cut into the stem and remove the larvae. Plants can be treated using Thiodan.
- Transition responsibilities to summer care team.

- Add leaf mulch around plants in the garden beds.
- Fertilize plants that have just began to fruit by adding fertilizer to the side of the plant (side dress).
- Pinch herbs to keep bushy and fresh. The best time to harvest herbs is just before flowering.
- If summer care is not available, plant a summer cover crop or sweetpotatoes.

HARVESTING

- Pick salad greens, kale, mustard greens, green onions, beets, peas, herbs, and radishes, leeks, broccoli, cabbage, collards.

PLAN AHEAD

- Include the garden in Field Day – have water relays, weeding bingo, or bug hunts!

SUMMER CARE



FIGURE 6-10. Weeding is a never ending task in the summer garden.



FIGURE 6-11. Watering becomes very important in the summer if there are vegetable crops growing.

PLANTING

- Since many schools aren't in session during the summer when early-planted crops will bear fruit some summer planting needs to be done in order to ensure a fall harvest. Be sure that any late June plantings of summer squash, cucumbers, etc. happen on schedule.

TENDING

- Water: Check for water needs every week. Seed beds require much more frequent watering until seeds germinate. If there is not much rain, deep watering will be necessary for established plants. This means really flooding the ground while making sure to not displace seeds.
- Weed: Frequent weeding is best. Light scraping of small weed seedlings on a hot, dry day takes only minutes. Pulling once the weeds get big can take hours. Timing is important –the more often, the better!
- Trellis: Trellising of tomato vines by tying them to their panels every foot or so of growth is important. In addition, gourd or squash vines need help finding their way up and over arbors.
- Hill: Hilling potatoes may be necessary mid-summer if tubers are pushing up into the sunlight.
- Damage Control: Storm damage should be checked for promptly if heavy wind or rain has occurred. Any downed plants should be tied up.

- Pests: Inspect for pests that may be causing problems in the garden. Some of the main pests to watch for: flea beetles on brassicas (kale, cabbage, broccoli, kohlrabi, etc.) and eggplant, cabbage butterfly larvae on brassicas, cucumber beetles on cucurbits (squash, melons, cucumbers, etc.), squash vine borers on all squash species but butternut squash, and potato beetles.

HARVESTING

- Harvest anything that becomes ripe, even before school starts. It is important to pick summer squash, cucumbers, and beans regularly (at least every 3 days), because bigger fruits begin to stop future production. Consider donating it to a local food pantry or meal program. Families adopting the garden may also enjoy taking home some of the produce!
- Possible Donation Site: Share the Harvest (<http://www.sharetheharvestguilfordcounty.org/collection-sites.html>)

PLAN AHEAD

- Get the garden on the schedule for back to school events: New Teacher Orientation, Teacher workdays before students start, Open House, family events, etc. Invite folks through the garden on walking tours; hold workshops on garden education, etc.

