

# WISCONSIN SCHOOL GARDEN INITIATIVE BRIEF

## TIPS FOR CREATING AN ACCESSIBLE SCHOOL GARDEN



**Wisconsin Partnership Program**  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN  
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AND PUBLIC HEALTH

**An accessible school garden is one that gives all students an opportunity to participate in its activities. While this brief offers general suggestions for garden design, bed styles, tools, practices, and preparation that will help a garden serve as an inclusive setting, remember that communicating with children, their caregivers, and experienced school personnel will best create a garden where all children can comfortably and safely grow, play, and learn.**

### Garden Design

The flow of a garden can help all garden visitors feel comfortable. Consider the layout of pathways. A wide center aisle with limited side spokes will provide enough room for students to pass comfortably without tight corners. Imagine a school hallway with classrooms as the spokes. Just as a roomy hallway serves as the main corridor of the school, a wide center pathway can serve as the main corridor of a garden. A wide pathway is the first step in ensuring everyone can move adequately. Consideration of the material of this pathway is a second step. Some schools choose to make these pathways out of a hard surface like crushed rock. Other schools ensure that pathways are maneuverable by placing wooden planks in walkways when natural pathways may be affected by rain. Finally, no matter the material, keep paths clear of debris, holes, uneven terrain, or other problems that make moving along them a challenge.



Thomas Jefferson Elementary, Wausau

### Tools

Maintaining a tidy shed accessible to all students with a number of different types of garden tools will help all gardeners feel welcome. Organize tools with labels or pictures and store at a height comfortable for young students. Ensure that all tools are in good repair. Some tools to invest in may be tools with rubber grips or longer



handles. A selection of child-sized garden gloves will make working in the soil less intimidating for some students.

### Bed Styles

Varying garden bed types offer more opportunity for all students to plant, care for, and harvest the garden. An in-ground bed might serve the needs of some students, while raised beds with bench seating can help other students access garden activities. Beds that are raised to standing or wheelchair height, whether on silts or as a crèche, is another style to consider. Vertical and container gardens offer even more options for diverse gardeners.



Lakeland Little Learners, Elkhorn



## Garden Practices

Students come to the garden with varying degrees of comfort with such activities. To ensure that all students feel welcome in the space, offer a number of different garden activities during each visit. Students should be encouraged to join in as they feel ready. This may mean that some students have their hands in the soil during the first minute of the lesson, while others may choose to watch their classmates for the entirety of the activity. Anywhere along the spectrum of participation should be not only accepted, but celebrated!

### Tips for Preparing for the Garden Setting

- Some students may require preparation to be comfortable in a new setting, which could include talking about the garden for a few days in advance, or showing pictures of it to create a sense of familiarity.
- Ensure all needs of comfort are met before entering the garden. For example, encourage bathroom use before going outside and make sure everyone is properly dressed for the weather.
- Also take care to prepare for comfort once in the garden. Supports that are used in the classroom might be of use outside in the garden. Consider bringing a specific chair, cushion, or support outdoors.
- Include the garden as part of a routine, whether it is weekly garden programming or walking through the garden during recess each day. Frequent short visits help students feel comfortable, and engaged.
- Recruit garden buddies. Extra hands — be they of older students, parent volunteers, or community gardeners — will keep the garden setting safe and students actively involved.



Lake Valley Camp

### Resources

School Gardens are for Everyone article on Kids Gardening: <http://www.kidsgardening.org/node/12190>

The Herb Society—Sensory Gardens for Special Education Students: [http://www.herbsociety.org/resources/t4k/documents/Sensorygardensforspec\\_000.pdf](http://www.herbsociety.org/resources/t4k/documents/Sensorygardensforspec_000.pdf)

Suggested Readings in Horticultural Therapy: <http://ahta.org/horticultural-therapy/suggested-readings>

Gardening for Life: <http://pnwmg.org/pdf/mggardenforlife.pdf>

#### Looking for more resources?

The Wisconsin School Garden Initiative website at [WISchoolGardens.org](http://WISchoolGardens.org) is frequently updated with new information about implementing and sustaining school gardens and garden-based education.

Check out our listing of garden [grants](#), garden-based [curriculum and activities](#), tips for [planning](#) or [sustaining](#) a garden, our monthly [e-newsletter](#), and more!



#### For more information about the Wisconsin School Garden Initiative,

visit us at [WISchoolGardens.org](http://WISchoolGardens.org)

or contact us at

[Community GroundWorks](http://CommunityGroundWorks)

3601 Memorial Drive, Suite 4

Madison, WI 53704

Phone: 608-240-0409

E-mail: [wsgi@communitygroundworks.org](mailto:wsgi@communitygroundworks.org)