

TELLING YOUR GARDEN STORY



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

Every garden is ripe with stories. Maybe it is one about the day the first shovel-full of soil was turned over and the garden was underway. Or about that time a brave rabbit dared to sample lettuce amidst a class of kindergartners partaking in a garden lesson. Each story has the potential to connect others with your garden and garden program. This brief offers tips for collecting and sharing the garden stories that make your garden program so special.

Story-telling goals

We tell stories for lots of different reasons—to entertain, to connect with others, to ask for help. The same reasons apply to story-telling for your garden. Understanding your goal in telling a story will help you craft your story effectively. The list below includes some common story-telling goals as well as story examples for each goal.

Engagement Stories – Goal: to draw others into the garden program

- Informing about the garden program (Did you know our school has a garden?)
- Highlighting specific garden events (Over two dozen families participate in Garden Harvest Party)

Promotional Stories – Goal: to exemplify the benefits of the garden program

- Students trying/liking garden produce (6th graders gobble garden kale)
- Teachers reports of positive benefits of garden (Students calmed by time in garden)

Resource Development Stories – Goal: to illustrate needs to continue garden programming

- Requests for donations or specific skills (Help us keep the garden growing!)
- Recognition of donors and volunteers (Thanks for your support)



Garden shed bulletin board at Van Hise Elementary, Madison

Collecting garden stories

While garden stories are all around, collecting them may require some effort. Create multiple avenues for collecting stories—a mailbox in the school office, an electronic form, a journal in the garden shed—and communicate their presence often. Regular reminders to all garden stakeholders and convenient collection points will help capture stories throughout the season so they are ready when you need them. Shared memories need not be long—quotes capture moments that are the beginning of stories. Don't forget to thank those that contribute stories. Appreciation is the best encouragement to keep sharing!

Story-telling outlets

Once you have your garden story, it's time to share it! Stories can be shared through a number of channels. Consider the following:

1. Oral stories — perfect your elevator speech or pitch for when you have an audience of one, or many!
2. Self-publish — publish a newsletter (electronic or print) to share your garden stories. Then, select the best to include in grant reports or other more formal documents. Funders love hearing specific examples about the impact of their funds.
3. Press releases — share your garden stories with the local media. Newspapers and television stations are often quick to pick up positive stories featuring kids.
4. Social media — post, pin, and tweet your garden happenings. Social media can be a great place to share photos, quotes, and videos of gardeners enjoying their space.



Cathedral Elementary School in the news

A note about sharing stories...

When sharing stories with full names, quotes, and pictures, ensure you've received the proper permissions to do so. Create and document a protocol for sharing stories. This can then be disseminated to teachers, parents, community members, and other garden participants as appropriate.

Resources

The Wisconsin School Garden Initiative website at www.wischoolgardens.org is chock-full of resources for telling your school garden story. Try these two to start:

School Garden Media Guide:

http://www.communitygroundworks.org/content/wisconsin-school-gardens-news#Media_Resources

School Garden Stories:

<http://www.communitygroundworks.org/content/stories>

Read all about it!

School garden stories are being captured all over Wisconsin. Read about other garden programs by clicking on the links below or by visiting the "Stories" tab at www.wischoolgarden.org!

Cathedral School—Beth Piggush loves seeing kids run from the playground to the garden to grab an after school snack. "Ground cherries are a favorite," the Cathedral Elementary volunteer garden coordinator said. "Cherry tomatoes and beans are great too. Whatever they can find and try, they'll eat."



Webster Elementary—At Webster Elementary, students look up to their peers. They don't have to look too far, however. That's because the school's oldest students – fourth graders – can be found squatting down to harvest potatoes, wrangle weeds, or investigate soil critters with Webster's younger Garden Buddies.



Green Bay West High School—E-ben Grisby wanted his students to know that you don't have to fit a stereotype to do organic gardening. A year later, he has helped student leaders at Green Bay's West High School create a garden that debunks pre-conceived notions about who can grow good food, or what that food should be.



Weston School District—Seven years ago, Carl Welke went for a walk around the school grounds. Stopping next to a field full of weeds, he thought, "This would be a great place for a garden." He called a recent Weston alumnus, and asked if he would be interested in helping. Forty-five minutes later, the alumnus showed up at Welke's door with a tractor and plow.



For more information about the Wisconsin School Garden Initiative,
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