

Sustainable productive food gardens in schools



LESS INPUTS... MORE OUTPUTS

Before setting up your school garden, here are some factors to plan for:

- **BE REALISTIC:** A small garden might produce enough for tasting, but not for meals; fruit trees can take 4-5 years before cropping. You might have to budget to supplement your produce and you might need to plan for a glut as well!



- **INVOLVE VOLUNTEERS:** Gardens take work. A team of volunteers makes all the difference. (At the risk of stereotyping, Kin Kin State School had a wonderful team of retired women - all keen gardeners, who loved the opportunity to get out and socialise as well as to garden and help the school).

Why not set up a jobs board for people who can only do the occasional half-hour work?¹.

¹ Remember BLUE CARDS for non-parents.

- **LOCAL EXPERTISE:** Every area supports different crops - depending on climate, soil etc. Don't be afraid to ask your local school community for expert advice - gardeners will talk underwater about their passion. And join your local Facebook Garden Group, too.
- **PLANTS' BASIC NEEDS:** Check that you can provide space with 6 hours sunlight, healthy soil and adequate water - including over holidays.
- **MAXIMISE THE GROWING SPACE:** Build simple trellisses, climbing supports, and arches over paths between beds, using recycled and found materials - to grow climbing plants (passionfruit, beans, climbing spinach etc).



- **INCLUDE PERENNIAL CROPS:** Have herbs, and other perennials like Malabar climbing spinach or Brazilian spinach, so that you always have something to eat from the garden (while you wait for the annuals to grow).

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- **PLANT GROWDCOVERS AS 'LIVING MULCH':** Instead of buying mulch every few months, plant edible groundcovers to suppress weeds, reduce evaporation and protect the soil.

In Kin Kin, I found the best groundcover included strawberries, prostrate rosemary, native violets, oregano, Brazilian spinach. Under fruit trees I planted more vigorous ones, like Betel leaf, pinto peanut, lemongrass. Again local expertise will help your plans.



- **PLANT EASY-TO-GROW PLANTS:** Try cherry tomatoes, European herbs, purple king beans and cucamelons.

In our orchard, cherry guava, bananas, pomegranates, and tree tomatoes were low-maintenance. Citrus can be hard work - limes and grapefruit are the easier ones. Also, grow some fruit that will crop within a couple of years - like passionfruit vines and tree tomatoes.

- **DONATIONS & GRANTS:** Nurseries, hardware stores and chains, cafes, manure suppliers, Ag Supply stores were all thrilled to donate goods to the school. Stay aware of grants - there are online grant finders you can register with and receive alerts.

- **CONVERT WASTE INTO PLANT FOOD:** Kids love making worm towers (so easy to use, to convert scraps into fertiliser). Worm farms, compost bays and chooks are all great options, too - although they take a little more work.



For more information see www.hw.qld.gov.au/pick-of-the-crop or contact Keith at potcgympie@bfvg.com.au.

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