



Starting a Garden: Step by Step

Steps to Starting a Garden:

1. Create a game plan
2. Build a support network
3. Assess the space and determine what kind of garden makes sense
4. Decide what to grow
5. Gather supplies and volunteers
6. Set-up the garden and keep it growing
7. Incorporate garden activities into everyday routines

Step by Step:

1. Create a game plan

Questions to consider	Notes
Who should help plan the garden? Who should be on the garden team once it is established?	
Why do you want a garden?	
What will kids do in the garden?	
How will your garden integrate with activities you are already doing?	
How much time will you spend in the garden?	
Who will plant and maintain the garden? Consider when this will need to be done throughout the year and who will be available.	
How will the food in the garden be used?	
What costs will be associated with the garden? What funds are available or needed to cover those costs?	



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2. Build a support network

Think about whose support you'll need. The stronger the team, the more support and sustainability for the garden. Parents can be great champions, but keep in mind that they will likely leave within their children leave. You want to create a team that will get others involved and lend a helping hand.

Questions to consider	Notes
Do you have support from administrators or site authority?	
What will be the roles of each of the following? How will you gain, strengthen, or maintain their support – or address their concerns? <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Teachers▪ Parents▪ Donors▪ Volunteers▪ Cook/kitchen staff▪ Custodial staff and groundskeepers▪ Others?	
Who could be a "Garden Champion"?	

3. Assess the space and determine what kind of garden makes sense

Before starting a garden, assess the space. Make sure there is at least 6 hours of sunlight, water is available, and the size is appropriate. Remember, you can start small! The space could involve planting in the ground, or using containers (even indoors), raised beds, or troughs.

Questions to consider	Notes
How close is the space to the classroom?	
Is the space accessible to everyone who will help with the garden? Is it accessible on weekends or during the summer?	

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How much sun does the area get?	
Is there access to water (e.g., spigot, hose)?	
What is the size of the space?	
Do other groups use the space?	

Type	Pros	Cons
Window sill garden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can grow in off-season • Can be used to grow starts to plant outside later • Enables students to see early stages of growth • Easy first step 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limits on what can grow – often herbs or lettuce • Requires a sunny window or grow lights
Container garden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moveable • Affordable • Requires little space • May be able to start plants indoors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smaller selection of plants to grow • Smaller area for many kids
Untreated wood raised beds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be made different heights • Able to grow a variety of plants • Can be easier than digging into the ground 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to move • Requires larger space • High material and labor cost



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Can often find donated materials and helping hands 	
Galvanized troughs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Able to grow a variety of plants ● Low labor cost ● Long lasting ● Can be easier than digging into the ground 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Difficult to move ● Requires larger space ● Can cost more than wood raised beds
Gardening in the ground	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Minimal structural purchases ● Can grow a variety of plants ● No space limitations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Soil testing may be required ● Permanent ● Increased risk of pests and weeds ● High labor cost





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4. Decide what to grow

Ask children, teachers, parents, and cooks what they would like to see in the garden. Think about these important considerations. Make sure that plants of interest are safe for young children (e.g., no poisonous parts or thorns).

Questions to consider	Notes
Is the program open in the summer?	
How much space is available?	
When will the plants be harvested?	
Would you rather plant annuals or perennials?	
How will kids be using the garden space?	
Will produce from the garden be use in the early learning site? If so, what could be easily used for snacks or lunches?	
What will kids have fun tasting and growing?	

See the training Resource List for places to find more guidance on good plants to grow.



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5. Gather supplies and volunteers

Once the garden plan is ready, think about the supplies and materials you need. Having kid-sized tools is important and fun, but make sure to have adult-sized tools too. Materials like soil can add up, so consider where you can get bulk orders if needed. Then, think about how you'll cover the garden expenses. CACFP dollars can be used to purchase supplies to start a garden. If you use these funds, use the garden produce in reimbursable meals or for nutrition education materials. You can also look for a Master Gardener Community Garden Grant Program and ask local nurseries and hardware stores. Create a garden "wish list" to share parents and community members so they know what you need and how they can help.

<i>The garden</i>	<i>Garden tools</i>	<i>Extras</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Galvanized trough, containers, or raised beds materials*• Soil• Hose• Seeds and/or plan starts• _____• _____• _____	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trowels• Rakes• Gloves• Buckets• Storage for garden tools• _____• _____• _____• _____	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tables• Benches• Magnifying glasses• Worm or compost bin• Garden signs• _____• _____• _____• _____

***Garden Bed / Container Depth Guide:**

- Containers 8" – 18" deep are good for herbs, arugula, lettuce, kale, spinach, and radishes
- Containers 18" – 24" deep are good for beans, carrots, chard, cucumber, peas, and peppers
- Containers 24" – 36" deep are good for tomatoes and squash

Where do you plan to seek financial and in-kind support for your garden?



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Who will be your garden helpers? Will they need any training or support?

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6. Set up the garden and keep it growing

Now, come up with a plan for installing and maintaining your garden. Will you rely on work parties or regularly scheduled helpers? What calendar or sign-up tools do you need and who will manage those?

It's also important to thank those who help with the garden and take steps to maintain enthusiasm for the garden. You can take and share pictures of produce or recipes that use the produce, share the harvest with helpers and the community, host a garden stand, or plan a harvest celebration.

What system(s) will you use to get the garden set up and keep it maintained?

What steps will you take to maintain enthusiasm for the garden?

7. Incorporate garden activities into everyday routines

What are some ideas you have for integrating the garden into routines at the childcare center? (See resource list for curriculum ideas.)