



# Keeping the Garden (and Garden Education) Alive During Summer Break

## Guidance for School Garden Leaders

### Getting Started

School and community gardens are an ideal place to extend environmental education beyond the classroom and into the summer. Sadly, many school gardens are forgotten in the summer, when most students and faculty are on break. With some advance planning though, school garden leaders can help students and their families take advantage of the educational opportunities the summer school garden has to offer while ensuring the school garden is maintained. Organizing summer community engagement will not only ensure garden survival, but that the garden and its bounty will be ready for use when school begins again in the fall.



### What's in this Resource:

- Best Practices to Prepare, Recruit and Organize Summer Garden Maintenance and Engagement
- Resources for Planting and Harvesting Georgia Summer Crops
- Organizations and Experts that can Support Summer Garden Work



## Prepare the Garden for Your Absence

- Clean, weed, and plant cover crop or low maintenance summer crops.
  - Examples of cover crops in Georgia could be Buckwheat, Millet, Cowpeas, Sorghum-sudangrass, or soybeans. Reference [Using Cover Crops in the Home Garden by the UGA Extension](#) to learn more.
- Mulch with wood chips, compost, or pine straw to suppress weeds and conserve moisture.
- Meet with the school custodians to inform them of your plans and possibly engage them in helping.
- Create and post signage on social media to let summer visitors know how to get involved in the garden.
- Create a school garden binder to keep on-site that contains a garden task log, how-to guidance, and maps of the school garden area.



## Recruit School Community Members

- One month prior to the end of the school year, advertise the need for summer school garden helpers through newsletters, e-mail communications, and social media.
- Engage students in virtual outreach efforts, encouraging them to share with their families and on social media.
- Check-in with educators who may be hosting summer school sessions or summer camps at the school.
- Using [Calendly](#), [Sign Up Genius](#), or another online group scheduling tool, ask volunteers to sign up for one or two weeks of summer garden maintenance in exchange for the garden harvest.
  - Double-check your school district's policies regarding volunteers and summer programming to ensure rules and regulations are followed (e.g., filing waivers for volunteers, getting access to school grounds, water, etc.).

Check out this [Collective School Garden Network](#) "[Building a School Garden Support Network](#)" resource for ideas on engaging community members in a thriving school garden.

# Develop Simple Guidance Instructions for Garden Helpers



- Create an easily accessible maintenance calendar, [using our priorities and scheduling template](#) to get started!
  - Using the Google Docs template, Google Calendar, or your school's preferred shared calendar, note all required maintenance tasks.
    - We suggest outlining a weekly schedule that will include tasks such as watering, weeding, and harvesting.
    - Additionally, you can add other optional projects that would be nice to have done, but are not critical for summer garden survival.
  - Make sure the sharing settings are open to all garden helpers.
  - Share the calendar with all garden helpers on social media, through newsletters, and by email.
  - Show your appreciation with produce!
    - Offer volunteers the harvest in exchange for their efforts. Sharing fruits and vegetables from the garden is a great way to send Farm to School home and encourage adventurous eaters.

## Other Models for Summer Garden Engagement

There are a variety of ways to involve more active school community members in summer school maintenance. If you have willing and available leaders for summer school gardening activities, consider these ideas:

### Adoption Projects

- Allow families and other community members to adopt a garden bed, or specific crops, or areas of the garden to be responsible for during the summer.
  - This commitment requires dedication and consistency. It often works well for families that live very close to the school.
  - Ensure that volunteers have all of the resources and guidance they need through training, orientations, and grower's guides or visual aids with detailed instructions that are housed on-site.

### Establish garden drop-in hours

- Host times throughout the week during which students and their families can come to the garden and work with a master gardener, school staff member, or with a small group.
- Using a Google sheet or form, have students and families sign up for specific dates and tasks, such as planting, watering, harvesting, turning compost, weeding certain beds, etc. on specific dates.
  - See our [garden priorities and scheduling template](#) as a guide for organizing drop-in hours.
- Plan a goal for each drop-in session that is realistic, regardless of the number of participants or potential time constraints.
  - Specific objectives based on garden needs ensure that volunteers know exactly what to do and can promote a sense of accomplishment at each gardening session.
    - Example: Weed garden paths OR wash and wipe clean all garden equipment OR, turn compost and water all beds.

# Resources to Support Caring for Summer Gardens

These resources will give you the knowledge and tools necessary to nurture a successful garden.

## Planting Guides

Resources to help you determine the best produce to grow in Georgia during the summer, and techniques for bringing your garden to life!

- [Horticulture maps](#) - Determine your hardiness zone, research the climate in your area, become aware of local weather patterns, regional botanical information and frost/drought levels.
- [Monthly growing guides](#) - UGA Extension's tips for Georgia vegetable and fruit gardens, types of crops to grow, etc.
- [Detailed produce planning calendar](#) - Updated annually by the Farmer's Almanac, this resource suggests optimal times and conditions for growing summer fruits and vegetables in Georgia. (Change to your specific location in GA at the top.)
  - When planning summer plantings, remember:
    - Choose low maintenance plants. There are a plethora of exciting summer produce options, but base your choices on the level of community participation and human resources at your disposal. 'Trowel and error' should be expected.
    - Seek plants with high drought tolerance and vigorous foliage just in case volunteers forget to water.
      - *Okra happens to be a low-maintenance, drought-tolerant, hardy plant, by the way, and we are celebrating it this year during [October Farm to School Month!](#)*
    - Think about the fall crops which require planting in warmer months and include those in your summer planning.

## Watering Practices

- Consider whether or not your garden will have an irrigation system or rely on manual watering techniques.
- Plan a watering schedule based on
  - [Watering charts](#) for summer produce
  - [Basic watering practices](#)
  - Potential [sources of water](#) for Georgia gardens

## Weed Identification

- Ask [your local UGA extension office](#) what weeds are common in your area.
- Consult the [Farmers Almanac](#) for general info and make your own weed classifying resource.

## Soil Characteristics

Soil conditions are foundational to sustain necessary minerals and pH levels for plants to grow healthy and strong!

- [Purchase home testing kits](#) or reach out to your [UGA extension office](#) to receive a detailed overview of soil quality and recommendations for creating an optimal growing environment.



## Sun Exposure

It is crucial to consider the various sunlight needs of different plants to decide appropriate placements for crop growth.

- Terminology for sun exposure:
  - Full sun - Plants need at least 6 hours of direct sunlight per day
  - Partial sun - Plants that need between 3-6 hours of direct sunlight per day
  - Partial shade - Plants need between 3-6 hours of sunlight per day but do not thrive directly under the mid-day sun
  - Full shade - Plants require less than 3 hours of direct sunlight per day

## Expert Advice

- Reach out to [your local UGA extension office](#) for advice and guidance from a local agent.
- Sign up for monthly email reminders from the National Gardening Association [www.garden.org](http://www.garden.org) for regional gardening information and other supports.
- Check out [Life Lab's recorded webinar](#) for more ideas to keep your school garden flourishing over the Summer!



# Share the Achievements of your Summer Growth!

Fostering a summer garden environment for your school community is a big accomplishment -- you should share with the world! Sending gratitude and giving due credit to participants can create long-term investment in your gardening projects, and further, generate a sense of community. Additionally, posting your gardening endeavors on social media will develop interest and spread awareness of summer experiential learning opportunities.

**We hope that this advice will help you to grow a summer garden that is absolutely 'radishing.' You will never have a 'dill' moment with kids out in the summer garden!**

