

Youth Gardens: An Idea That Worked

Guidelines For Community



CHILDREN PARTICIPATING in the youth garden program have found a place to go... their garden... where the products, benefits and rewards are theirs. They take pride in a living plant they created, nurtured, prodded and harvested. They have participated in a highly creative activity.

How Washington Did It

In the nation's capital a few years ago, a group of concerned citizens joined together to combine... in one activity... a child's natural curiosity and his love of beauty.

group study programs which include slides, movies, film strips and text books. The children also participate

in flower shows, Christmas greens workshops, soil and plant studies, and other garden-related projects.

- Talk to civic and government leaders interested in community betterment. If possible, work with the local recreation department in coordinating the program. The department's relationships with children provide excellent opportunities to get the youngsters interested in the program.
- If possible, get the city to appropriate funds for the project. If not, talk to community-minded businessmen or civic clubs to get financial support to begin the program.
- Publicize your plans. You may be surprised by the number of offers you receive from people who would not feel qualified to volunteer as a garden adviser, but who would be glad to help with funds and supplies. Continue publicity efforts throughout the program. Take before and after photographs... and pictures of children working in the gardens. Continuing interest by the public is a great boost to the project and to the children.
- Obtain the use of small plots of land within city parks or playgrounds, from business firms or interested individuals. Often land owners who are not building on a particular lot or who do not plan to for some time will be more than willing to lend the land for a Youth Garden project. There is always some land somewhere not in use. Check with the property owner to coordinate plans. The county or city Tax Assessor's Office will supply you with the name of a property owner, if not known.
- Get help and advice from experts. Consider such people as nurserymen, landscape architects, county extension agents, agriculture instructors, park superintendents, etc. These people are qualified to advise a garden director on the proper care and feeding of plants and can also design a plan of action for the project. Ask the expert's advice on what type plants grow in the proposed location, if the soil is adequate for planting, etc.
- Get materials for plantings—seeds, tools, fertilizer. Area garden stores may be willing to offer special rates for seeds, fertilizer and other planting aids. Homeowners may donate garden tools. Make a checklist of all material you will need and check it with your local garden expert to see if you have forgotten anything.
- Start the actual planning of the garden. Involve the children in the planning stages as much as possible. Most likely they will not have many ideas at first, but the cooperation and learning provides ideas for next year or the year after that. It also gives them a sense of participating that they are planning with the garden director—not merely carrying out his plans.
- Tell the children what they will be doing and what the

results will be. Give them a step by step timetable and try to follow it as closely as possible. A film strip or movie on basic gardening is recommended to introduce the children to the county agricultural extension agent, or the library of a land-grant college.

- Plan an end-of-season festival or fair where the children can display their harvests. Give awards for the largest vegetable or largest flower—the best garden—the most enthusiastic gardener, etc.
- After the growing season has ended, plan indoor activities—dish gardens, potted plants, forced bulbs, terrariums. The children can learn to make Thanksgiving decorations. Christmas decorations can be awarded for the best scrapbook, best Christmas wreath, etc. Movies, slides, film strips, and pamphlets on gardening are available on request from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. 20250.

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