



School Gardens— Plant, Water and Learn!



A significant goal of the **Green Education Foundation (GEF)** is to promote creative and effective ways for schools and teachers to shrink the nature deficit and incorporate the outdoors into their curricula. One great way to get kids more involved in nature is through gardening. Many schools today are planting gardens as a way to engage children in the most basic of human-nature relationships.

Planting a garden is a multi-faceted educational opportunity for all involved. A recent survey by the Kids Gardening Organization found that teachers who planted gardens with their students incorporated lessons in science, health, math and many other subjects. These teachers also found that gardening was a great way to teach collaboration amongst their students as well as fostering a sense of commitment.

Gardening also provides the perfect mechanism for teaching children the importance of eating well. Is there a better opportunity than planting vegetables to discuss nutrition with kids? Health professionals today are extremely concerned with the scope and magnitude of childhood obesity and the serious long-term health ramifications of poor nutrition. Developing healthy eating habits early in life is much easier than battling weight gain later on. Nutrition, calories and even human anatomy are subjects easily connected to gardening.

Gardening is also an ideal medium for teaching children about environmental concerns. As experts continue to uncover the local and global environmental effects of food production and consumption, the need for educated, conscientious consumers will grow. Gardens are the perfect environment for teaching youth how fertilizers, pesticides and fossil fuels negatively impact the planet and human health. Providing children with this hands-on education about where their food comes from and how it is produced can only help develop smarter, healthier consumers.

Lastly, gardening carries the benefits of merely being outdoors. Current research indicates that children learn better and have fewer emotional problems when they have regular exposure to nature. Richard Louv, Chairman of the National Forum on Children and Nature and recipient of the 2008 Audubon Medal states that “children are suffering from ‘nature-deficit disorder,’ an alienation from nature that diminishes the use of senses and leads to attention difficulties and higher rates of physical and emotional illnesses.” Planting a garden addresses these important concerns in a fun and interactive way.

GEF is launching the largest youth based gardening initiative of all time during the **Green Thumb Challenge**, calling on schools and groups to plant 10,000 gardens in 2010. Register by Dec. 15, 2009 and be entered into a raffle for garden kits for your school or group and be eligible for a \$5000 grant.

Enroll at www.greeneducationfoundation.org for all the details.