

## Planning and managing your growing space throughout the year

Many schools decide to start their food growing projects late in the spring term each year, but they are missing out on lots of opportunities and activities which can take place all year round.

Below are some ideas you may wish to consider:

### Spring term – 1st half-term

As the weather at this time of year could be very cold and wet, this is a good time to start planning for the year ahead. You may be just starting your project and need to involve others in your school community to help.

- **Hold a meeting with parents and the local community.** Talk about ideas for your growing project. Ask parents to help with maintenance of the tools, cleaning pots and trays and making other repairs.
- **Check your tools and equipment.** Get your 'garden team' to audit the tools and equipment and make a list of anything, which might be needed this year.
- **Check packets of leftover seeds.** Look at 'use by dates'. These may not mean you have to throw packets away. To check if the seeds you have left will germinate, put a few on a damp paper towel and leave in a warm, dark place. They should germinate within three weeks if they are still viable. Keep future seeds in a cool, dry place.
- **Create a wish list of fruit, herbs, vegetables and flowers.** Try to involve every class in the school, asking them to list three favourite plants to grow.
- **Look online and order some plant catalogues.** Sometimes seeing pictures can help with deciding the types of plants to grow.
- **Create your own school 'Garden Planner'.** This can help remind you of when to sow and plant out each crop and is a personal document of what your school did each year.
- **Think about courses to help you upskill.** e.g. training courses and CPD  
Capital Growth - [www.capitalgrowth.org/training](http://www.capitalgrowth.org/training)  
RHS [www.rhs.org.uk/education-learning/gardening-children-schools/school-visits](http://www.rhs.org.uk/education-learning/gardening-children-schools/school-visits)
- **Integrate your projects with other curriculum areas.** This could be a 'Grow around the world' theme linked to the different cultures represented in your school and local community.

[www.foodgrowingschools.org](http://www.foodgrowingschools.org)

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- **Invite speakers in to inspire pupils** – why not find a farmer to speak to your school? Try: [www.schoolfoodmatters.com/find-a-farmer.html](http://www.schoolfoodmatters.com/find-a-farmer.html)
- **Ask parents to donate specific seeds, plants and spare tools.** As a thank you, each donor could receive a plant grown from the seeds donated.
- **Prepare your school growing area.** Weed and dig over areas which need attention. Add school-made compost to areas where ‘hungry’ plants, such as potatoes, will be grown.

## Spring term – 2nd half-term

With the planning out of the way, it is now time to start growing. To successfully grow plants you need to have a good environment to ‘bring the plant up in’. Initially when propagating seeds it is important to have a constant warm environment to help seeds germinate. But remember not to let the soil dry out and check them every day! Once a seed has germinated it needs to be placed in full, direct sunlight, ideally a greenhouse or poly-tunnel or a mini-greenhouse in your school grounds.

- **Sow in individual pots or modules** cucumber, melon, lettuce and herbs such as basil.
- **Sow in trays** tomato, pepper, cabbage family and herbs such as parsley and thyme. These will be transplanted to individual pots when they have two sets of leaves.
- **Sow outdoors** in the school garden beetroot, carrot, spinach, broad beans, peas, salad onions, rocket, onions and garlic.
- **Sow herb or salad boxes** in home-made wooden boxes or plastic window boxes.
- **Plant** some ‘Early’ potatoes in a large container or sack.
- **Make a light reflector.** This will help seedling kept on a window ledge to grow strongly.
- **Plants you could be harvesting** if you planned well back in the autumn term could include cauliflower, cabbage, kale, leeks and parsnips.

The Food For Life Partnership website has a series of growing cards in its ‘growing’ section: [www.foodforlife.org.uk/Resources/Teachingresources](http://www.foodforlife.org.uk/Resources/Teachingresources)

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## Summer term – 1st half-term

With young plants growing you'll be raring to go for the summer term. Use a rota of children, parents, and teachers who could come into school during the Easter break and look after your plants and growing area. Now is the busiest time for sowing new seeds and transplanting young plants into individual pots. Hopefully your poly-tunnel or mini-greenhouse is ready, as you will need lots of space to accommodate these young plants.

- **Consider how you use your produce.** You may want to use some in school cookery lessons or give some to your kitchen to use in school meals. Consider holding a school farmers market or a stall once a week to sell to parents, some of your produce could be made into other items such as cakes, pickles, jams and chutneys
- **Hold a 'Grow your own picnic'** to celebrate what you have achieved with your food growing project. Use your produce in your picnic and invite parents, local community and the press to highlight your success.
- **Sow in individual pots or modules** French beans, runner beans, courgettes, pumpkins and sweetcorn.
- **Sow in trays** cabbage family such as kale, calabrese and purple sprouting broccoli. These will be transplanted to individual pots when they have two sets of leaves.
- **Sow outdoors** in the school garden beetroot, carrot, spinach, peas, salad onions and rocket.
- **Check plants indoors and outdoors every day.** Keep plants moist but do not over water. Look out for pests and weeds. This will help plants to grow well and reduce work later in the summer.
- **Keep an eye on slug damage to young plants.** Set up some barriers or slug traps or even a 'Pest Detectors' Club. This is a great way of getting pupils looking for creatures in your growing area, identifying insects and learning if they are a 'friend' or 'foe' in the vegetable garden.
- **Use school made compost** around cabbage and potato family plants in the school garden and polytunnel/greenhouse. This will help to feed these hungry plants when they need it most and provide a mulch on the soil, cutting down on watering and weeding.

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## Summer term – 2nd half-term

Everything should be really taking off by now and any extra help from parents will really make a success of your growing area. Now is a busy time for looking after your fast-growing plants. If you have looked after your soil and fed it well your plants will be strong and able to withstand normal attack by pests. If your plants need a helping hand, make your own organic liquid fertiliser.

Make sure helpers over the summer holidays continue to harvest produce. It is a nice gesture of thanks to your volunteers if they can take some of the produce home. Create a rota to make sure everyone knows what their responsibilities are.

- **Raise the profile of your gardening project.** Advertise it in school newsletters, on your website and in local press. Ask your pupils to write letters and talk to parents. Hold events and invite the community in, for example bake sales, picnics and BBQs.

- **Protect plants from pests.** Cover plants in the cabbage family with a net or cloche. Cabbages are loved by pigeons, caterpillars and slugs. Keep the net well-pegged down at the edges to stop anything sneaking in! You could set up an experiment where one or two cabbage plants are not protected by a net and see if they survive as well as those under a net.

- **Keep greenhouse/poly-tunnel doors open**, especially during hot sunny days. Good air circulation is essential.

- **Make a liquid fertiliser** out of Comfrey and Nettle leaves. Use this to feed hungry crops such as tomato, pepper, cucumber and courgette.

- **Use school made compost or leaf mould** around your maturing plants. This will help reduce the need to water and weed as often, especially during the school holidays.

- **Continue to sow** salad leaves, rocket, spinach, peas and French beans. These will need looking after over the summer holidays but will give you fresh produce in the autumn term.

- **Check tomato plants.** Pinch off side shoots as they grow and tie them to a stake to support them.

- **Harvest 'early' potatoes.** Count, measure and weigh your produce in each container.

- **Plants you could be harvesting** include cucumbers, courgette, runner beans, French beans, broad beans, peas, calabrese, spinach, basil, beetroot, salad onions and lettuce.

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## Autumn term – 1st half-term

After the long summer break, hopefully you still have a thriving growing plot as good as you left it in July. This is a good time to start tidying your food growing area, planting crops, which can survive the winter months, and sowing protective 'green manure' crops in any bare soil.

- **Harvest any remaining crops** to store for later, turn into other produce, use in cookery lessons or give to your school kitchen.
- **Set up a 'Grow your own business' competition** around growing food or other business/enterprise project to encourage more pupil participation. Get pupils designing the labels and packaging as a D&T project.
- **Plant** broad beans, garlic and onion sets for next June. Choose varieties from seed catalogues.
- **Seeds to sow** during September and early October, which will survive the winter weather and be available to harvest in the spring term include leaf beet, chicory, rocket, corn salad, some lettuces, plus some Orientals like mizuma, komatsuna and pak choi.
- **Plants you could be harvesting** include basil, parsley, rocket, French bean, runner bean, Brussels sprout, cabbage, calabrese, carrot, cauliflower, courgette, leek, lettuce, onion, spring onion, parsnip, pea, potato, radish, squash, leaf beet, swede, sweetcorn and tomato.
- **Prune soft fruit** such as currants and gooseberries. Put the cuttings in pots or your food growing area. These will root and create new fruit bushes.
- **Pot strawberry 'runners'** into individual pots to sell later.
- **Save seeds** from some of your produce to grow next year. Runner beans, peas, tomatoes and pumpkins are all easy to save seed from and keep for sowing next year.
- **Sow 'green manures'** into any areas with bare soil. Green manures are plants that can help keep the soil covered over the winter months. They help with weed control and can add to soil fertility. Many seed catalogues now stock green manure seeds.

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## Autumn term - 2nd half-term

The nights may be drawing in but there is still plenty to do in your food growing areas. This is a good time of year to explore other aspects of an organic food-growing project. This includes composting, making leaf mould and learning how to look after beneficial wildlife.

- **Make leaf mould.** Put fallen leaves collected from around your school in empty compost containers or a 'bulk bag' from a builder's merchant. You could also make a wire mesh container to put leaves in.
- **Create a compost area.** School made compost is essential for healthy soil and plants. Even if you use well-rotted manure you should compost weeds, vegetable scraps and fruit waste. A good compost heap will produce valuable nutrition for the soil. Play the 'Yes, No, Maybe' compost game.
- **Attract beneficial wildlife into your school growing area.** Build a pond to attract frogs or make a hedgehog house, both animals eat numerous slugs. Create an over wintering home for insects, such as lacewings and ladybirds. The young of both of these insects eat hundreds of aphids each summer. By helping these animals through the winter you help your task of controlling future pest problems.
- **Start a school recipe book.** Invite pupils and parents to create seasonal recipes using some of the school-grown produce as ingredients. School Food Matters have some delicious cooking ideas [www.schoolfoodmatters.com/cooking-ideas.html](http://www.schoolfoodmatters.com/cooking-ideas.html)
- **Collect large plastic bottles,** which can be used as mini-greenhouses and protection from pests for individual plants.
- **Install a polytunnel or greenhouse** to extend your growing season or use smaller 'cloches' around individual plants. These could be made out of plastic water bottles or clear plastic pulled over hoops or sticks.

## Food Growing Schools: London

For more school food growing advice and resources visit: [www.foodgrowingschools.org](http://www.foodgrowingschools.org)

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