



School Garden Support: Success Stories and Lessons Learned

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School garden (Fig. 1) popularity is increasing every day in Pinellas County. Our objective was to increase Extension education in at least ten school gardens in Pinellas County in 2013, while also increasing the quality of those gardens and their learning opportunities. First, we identified one of our horticultural staff who could assist this agent with providing information and guidance to new and expanding school gardens. Next, we reached out to every public school in the county through email to offer our services. This agent and staff provided site visits, emails, fact sheets, grant funding information, links to the Farm to School program for school gardens, curriculum material information, and a one day school garden summer camp for teachers. The results have been successful; we have aided in the establishment, expansion, or rejuvenation of eleven school gardens. We have also linked three Master Gardener volunteers closely with several of these new school gardens for on-going education. Along the way we have learned many lessons about the logistics of how Extension can support school gardens. Some of those lessons include how to communicate with school board employees, visiting schools in light of increased school security measures, aligning our outreach with school and test scheduling, and how to coach school staff on the time and resource requirements for a successful school garden. Most importantly we have learned to manage the schools' expectation of what Extension can provide (education, resources, volunteer support), as well as, what we cannot provide (labor, free plants, free curriculum materials). This program could easily be replicated in any county provided some adaptations are



Fig. 1. Diversity Garden, San Jose Elementary School, Dunedin, FL.

made. School boards are likely to differ in the way they prefer to disseminate information electronically and school calendars and test dates will vary. Extension faculty, staff, and Master Gardener volunteer availability will vary as well and efforts must be made to adjust the amount of support that can be provided by various Extension offices.

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