



OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION

## Common Maintenance Tasks for a DC School Garden

### *Maintenance Tasks*

Below is an overview of garden maintenance tasks and recommendations for maintaining unique garden elements.

- Review the Friends of the National Arboretum's [Garden Maintenance Guide](#) for a list of tasks organized by seasons.
- Establish a process for managing volunteers.
  - Collect required forms such as background checks, waivers, and agreements.
  - Provide an onboarding training that include topics such as: tool use, schedule, tasks, and how to access the garden.
  - Coordinate with the facilities and custodial staff around the maintenance of existing landscaping that may be adjacent to, or within the garden such as grass, trees, and shrubs, as well as existing plans for rodent control.
  - Start an extended day open garden time, or family night in the garden in which small maintenance tasks can be completed.
  - Consider becoming a part of the [Shared Roots Program](#) which connects community members with underused garden spaces.
- Plant crops that will not need harvesting or maintenance over breaks. Sweet potatoes and some nitrogen fixing cover crops are ideal. Plan to harvest when students are in school (for example, plant spring and fall but not summer crops if no one will be using the garden during the summer months). Reference the [DC School Garden Planting Calander](#) for more information on when to plant.

### *Managing Unique Garden Elements*

#### *Compost*

Composting in schools can be accomplished with on-site compost bins, usually placed in the school garden, in a classroom (worm bins or vermicomposting) or through haul-away composting. Composting can be done year-round and is therefore often a focused activity during the winter months for many programs. Composting is an excellent activity to make connections between the cafeteria and the garden by collecting and sorting food scraps and turning them into soil for the garden. It is very important that on-site composting bins are properly maintained and are rodent-proof. Review the [School](#)

[Garden Safety Checklist](#) for more information on compost safety. Below are some resources to assist school garden programs with managing their compost system:

- Review the school composting resources on LifeLab's [Ultimate School Composting Page](#). This page includes a collection on composting how-to manuals, information on vermicomposting, compost bin examples, and examples of school-wide compost programs.
- Contact a partner organization that specialize in setting up compost programs for assistance.
- Contact the [Department of General Services- Organics Recycling Program](#) to find resources for building a composting program, equipment and supplies, and get information on composting hauling services.
- Engage the community in the on-site composting efforts by becoming a part of the [Community Compost Network](#).

### *Season Extension Structures*

Structures like greenhouses, hoop houses, cold frames, and even row covers can extend the growing season, increasing the number of days students can grow in the garden, and increasing the variety and quantity of produce grown. Below are some resources to assist school garden programs with managing their season extension structures:

1. The [Greenhouse Manual: An Introductory Guide for Educators](#) is a publication created by the United States Botanic Garden in collaboration with the National Center for Appropriate Technology and City Blossoms. The manual is designed as an introduction for educators who are beginning to explore ways to incorporate a greenhouse as a hands-on learning environment for students of all ages.
2. Watch the School Garden Support Organization's webinar [Winter Programming for SGSO's in Northern Climates](#).
3. The [How to Build a Large Hoop House](#) guide was developed while constructing a hoop house at Washington Yu Ying Public Charter School to help District schools build a hoop house.
4. Learn how to build a small hoop house over an existing raised bed by visiting the Maine School Garden Network's [Extending the Garden Season Using Raised Beds](#).
5. Learn more about tents, tunnels, cold frames, and cloches by visiting the Cornell University Cooperative Extension and Department of Horticulture's resource titled, [Other Season Extension Tools: Cloches and Cold Frames](#).

### *Hydroponic Systems*

Hydroponics involves growing plants by supplying all necessary nutrients in the plants' water supply rather than through the soil. Hydroponic school garden systems are

excellent for engaging students interested in technology and for schools that may not have the outdoor space for a traditional school garden. Below are some resources to assist school garden programs with managing a hydroponic system:

- Learn more about hydroponic systems by visiting the [KidsGardening Garden Basic: Hydroponic](#) page.
- Read about [students talking about their experiences with using hydroponic systems](#) and [Information on different hydroponic systems](#) from Green Our Planet.

### *Managing Critters*

School gardens are great places for students to observe wildlife and care for animals. Wildlife and animals are an effective way to engage students in the school garden, especially in urban environments like the District of Columbia where many students are disengaged with details pertaining to ecosystems, food systems, and life cycles. Wildlife and animals often attract students who are otherwise not interested in gardening and generate excitement among the entire school community. Additionally, animals such as hens provide students with an opportunity to better understand how to properly care for and establish a positive relationship with animals. Below are some resources to assist school garden programs with managing wildlife and animals:

1. Learn what it takes to get your schoolyard certified by visiting the [National Wildlife Foundation Schoolyard Habitats](#), which is a certification program for school grounds.
2. Design features to attract wildlife by visiting [Nature Works Everywhere](#), a program of the Nature Conservancy.
3. Learn more about native and non-native pollinator plants by visiting the [Native Pollinator Plants](#) maintained by the District Department of Energy and Environment.
4. Learn what it takes to establish honey bee apiaries for educational purposes by visiting the [Honeybees in Schools](#) page, maintained by the District Department of Energy and Environment.
5. Learn what it takes to establish hens in schools by visiting the [Chickens in Schools](#) page maintained by OSSE.