

TEN TOP TIPS TO GET YOU GROWING



1. MANY HANDS MAKE LIGHT WORK

Don't try to run a food-growing project all by yourself. For your project to be truly sustainable you need to spread the workload. Try two enlisting 'gardening monitors' from each class and organise a watering rota. Put a note in your newsletter ask for parent helpers. You only need two to keep the ball rolling.

2. WORKING BEES

If your parent helpers can gather a small army for just two Saturday mornings a year, you will keep things ship shape. In early spring they can help to get you ready for the growing season and late in the autumn it's all hands on deck to tidy up and tuck your plot in for winter.

3. LEARN FROM THE EXPERTS

There are many organisations offering free training for teachers and parents. Have a look at the links page on the School Food Matters website. The groups listed will give you advice, lesson plans, and offer training courses on specific challenges like composting and crop rotation. Some will even send you volunteers to get you started.

4. LESS IS MORE

Start small. A little plot with a few reliable and robust plants like courgettes, French beans, potatoes and pumpkins, will generate enough excitement to attract followers.

5. DON'T HIDE!

Garden where your hard work can be seen and create a buzz amongst parents and children. And don't forget to celebrate your achievements in assemblies and at harvest festivals. Before you know it, you'll have a market stall and you'll be selling your veg to parents.

6. LOSING THE PLOT

If your plot gets too big to handle, don't panic. Get it back down to size by dividing it up into manageable pieces and offer small plots to teachers. You may well find enthusiasts hiding in the staffroom who don't want to run a project but would like a corner to grow some salad for their lunch.

7. IT WON'T COST THE EARTH

You don't need to spend much to get started. £100 will buy you everything you need to build a couple of raised beds, including the top soil and for £1000 you'll get a fully kitted out allotment space, complete with shed, water butts, compost bins and tools. You can get lots of stuff for free by joining the organisations on our Links page.

8. FINDING FUNDING

Governors and PTAs are often very supportive of food-growing projects, especially if the learning opportunities are embedded throughout the school, and not limited to extra-curricula activity. Your local garden centre may also like to contribute and some gardening charities offer small grants to get you started.

9. WASTE NOTHING/BUY NOTHING

Once you get the hang of this gardening lark it won't cost you a penny. Here's an idea: leave a few bean pods on the beanstalk and allow to dry out as the plant withers. Pick and store over winter then in spring, pop open the pods to find your seed. Start the seeds off in tiny pots made from old newspapers filled with your home made compost, then transfer to old yoghurt pots until they are big enough to pop into the ground. Free beans!

10. SPACE...THE FINAL FRONTIER

You may have no open ground, but perhaps you've got a corner in the playground to park a grow bag for tomatoes, a sack for potatoes or some canes in an old tub for French beans? And don't forget your flowerbeds. Flowers make great companions for vegetables, attracting bees for pollination. You can even garden vertically with tomatoes and salad leaves in hanging baskets.



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GROWING IDEAS

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