

30 SCHOOL GARDEN tips



Thinking of starting a school garden or want to enhance your existing garden? Here are 30 tips to cultivate success! Find more ideas at www.bcaitc.ca.

- 1** Short on space? Think vertical! Fences, pergolas, trellises, hanging baskets, and stacked garden towers are great ways to grow upwards instead of outwards.
- 2** Start with healthy living soil before planting. Soil with organic matter, balanced nutrients, proper pH, and good drainage will help ensure plant growth.
- 3** Use plants native to BC. They are adapted to local conditions and grow well without additional water and fertilizer. Plus, they'll help pollinators (like bees and butterflies) and wildlife thrive!
- 4** Extend the growing season! Mini-greenhouses, hoop houses, and row covers allow growing all year long.
- 5** Find ways to extend your garden budget! Connect with organizations that offer school garden grants. Talk to your local garden centre about discounts. Contact a gardening club for volunteer help.
- 6** Do you like flowers and vegetables? Try growing edible flowers like nasturtium and viola, they bring colour to your garden and look beautiful in salads, desserts, and drinks.
- 7** Did you know that you can have a spring harvest of cold-tolerant vegetables (spinach, garlic, leeks, broccoli, arugula, kale...)? If you plant your crop mid-August to early October, you can.
- 8** The biggest threat to winter vegetable growth is the rain instead of the cold temperatures. If you are in areas with heavy winter precipitation, protect your vegetables with hoop tunnels with clear plastic and row cover, mulch, or cardboard to keep the heat in the soil so you can enjoy a spring harvest!
- 9** Purple vegetables contain a pigment called anthocyanin, that protects them from rot. In areas of the province with high precipitation, purple vegetables are a great choice in your garden.
- 10** Are neighbouring cats using your raised beds as a litter box? Try using scents to distract them like lavender, citrus peels, or essential oils such as rosemary. Cats like to dig in the soil, so deter them by adding items that would be rough on their paws like pinecones or plastic mesh. Cats also do not like to get muddy paws, so water often!
- 11** Start slow and experiment! Gardening is fun but be realistic with your goals to reduce frustration. Build on what grows well and expand on what you plant based on your successes.
- 12** There are more than 10,000 varieties of tomatoes; try growing different varieties and compare them. A tomato is not just a tomato, they come in all sorts of shapes, colours, and sizes.
- 13** You can grow next year from this year's seeds. The easiest vegetables to save seeds from are tomato, peppers, squash, peas/beans, cucumber, and leafy greens. Open-pollinated vegetables that are non-hybrid will produce the same crop next year with a little bit of effort.
- 14** The soil in the garden will dry out without regular watering. If you struggle to find watering help you may want to consider drought-tolerant plants like pole beans, peas, summer squash, turnip, tomatoes (Early Girl and Roma), and herbs.
- 15** Pests do not like highly scented plants. By adding fragrant herbs throughout your garden, you will attract the good pollinators and keep out unwanted pests!



16 Keep in mind when planning your schedule that the best time to water a garden is early morning (before the heat of the day).

18 When is the best time to clean up your garden? Spring! Beneficial insects like bees and ladybugs live in the leaf mulch so waiting until the temperatures rise to 10°C will support their survival.

20 What should happen with vegetables that your school produces in the summer months? They can be used to give thanks to volunteers that care for them or they can be donated to a local food bank!

22 Plan a harvest meal or a potluck with what was produced. It's a great way for students to experience the many ways to prepare the same vegetable.

24 When should you add soil amendments? When the garden is established and anytime after that when needed. Amendments like manure should be added in the fall to give it time to break down and nutrients available to the plants for the spring.

26 Consider the mature plant height when selecting where to grow them, tall plants will shade and inhibit the growth of smaller plants that need sun to reach their growth potential.

28 Tricks to grow great tomatoes! Bury the stem, it creates healthy roots. Use cages to keep plants and fruit off the ground. Plant so that they are not too crowded, airflow is essential. Don't get the leaves wet and remove leaves that touch the soil. Prune your plants to develop strong stems and more fruit. Remove any tomatoes with signs of blight right away, it spreads quickly, and can damage your yields!

30 Take pictures of your harvest and post them in the classroom; it's a great way to celebrate your success!

17 Do you have a weed problem? The best technique is to remove them when they are small and haven't produced seeds. You can also use vinegar and dish soap or salt and dish soap but be sure you spray the weed leaves and not your vegetables, plants, and the surrounding soil!

19 Not sure if the plants growing in your garden are vegetables or weeds? There is a series of apps that you can take a picture of the plant and it will tell you what is growing and, in some cases, how to care for the plant.

21 Select vegetables that will mature at times to fit the school calendar, students then get to experience the best part, the harvesting and tasting!

23 Does your soil have lots of nutrients but the plant struggles to grow? A pH test may help. pH influences the ability of the plant to absorb nutrients and can be easily tested with a soil probe and pH altered.

25 Do you want to personalize your raised garden containers? You can decorate them to make them unique by painting them or adding plant ID labels or a garden sign... be creative!

27 Something is eating the plants! It could be a rabbit; they can easily jump into a raised garden bed, or it could be other pests. Slugs and snails can be controlled with rough surfaced items like coffee grounds, diatomaceous earth, or grounded eggshell. The rough surface will scratch the pests' bodies, which eliminates them. Aphids can be controlled with the use of a soap and water mixture or an essential oil and water mixture.

29 You can add other components to your garden space by including bat houses, bug hotels, bee condos, bird houses, or develop a garden theme.

