

3.5 School Gardens (Pocket-Sized Farms)

Pocket-sized farms, or pocket farms, is another name for small areas of school property that are used to grow fruit, vegetables and other plants. More than just gardens, these mini farms can become a source of healthy, nutritious food and model a concern for healthy eating to students, parents and school staff.

Pocket farms help students learn about growing vegetables and fruit, where foods come from and why they are an important part of a healthy diet. They promote healthy eating, learning by doing, teamwork and an active lifestyle. For teachers, these gardens provide a practical teaching tool that allows elements of the curriculum like science or math to be taught in an outdoor classroom. For parents, pocket farms encourage their children to eat a vegetable or fruit they may otherwise never have tried.

Benefits of the Pocket-Sized Farm

- Students are brought closer to where and how their food is grown.
- Students experience a sense of satisfaction when they prepare and eat what the class has worked hard to produce.
- Teachers have a dynamic setting in which to integrate curriculum such as science, social studies, math, environmental studies or nutritional health.
- Community spirit is nurtured as the school builds partnerships with students, school staff, families and local businesses.
- School grounds are beautified and revitalized.

How to Get Started

Here are a few things to do and consider as you plan your school's pocket-sized farm:

- Form a garden committee that includes parents, school staff and local residents. Contact local horticultural groups for names of master gardeners who might be willing to help with your garden planning.
- Define the purpose and objectives of your garden. Decide how the produce will be used and what educational opportunities the garden will offer.
- Plan student activities to decide how the garden fits into the curriculum and whether it is for all grades or specific to certain grades.
- Define a year-round garden plan, considering who will look after the garden during summer break. Determine if there are families that are willing to take on a week's responsibility for the garden.
- Choose a permanent garden site and design the garden. Consider that the site needs plenty of light, good drainage, access to water, electricity and plenty of volunteers. Think small...large gardens can take up lots of time and energy!

For more information:

Littlejohn, G and T. Grant. *Greening School Grounds: Creating Habitats for Learning*. ISBN 0-86571-436-3.

- This is a guide for teachers through all the phases of a school grounds project, from developing a rationale that will win the support of principals and administrators through redesigning the grounds to all the educational uses of an outdoor classroom.

LIFE*SPIN. Available at: www.execulink.com/~life/

- Information on Pocket-Sized Farming at your school

A Pocket-Sized Farm Success Story

VK Greer Public School in Port Sydney, Ontario (part of the Trillium Lakeland District School Board) has been running a pocket farm for seven years. 'The soil was poor, drainage not much better', said teacher Bill Rantz, 'but, over the years, compost, leaves and manure have been added to the soil to help improve it'. The garden has grown potatoes, beans, peas, artichokes, zucchini, pumpkins, etc, over the years as well as sunflowers and a wildflower garden. The garden produce is used in a school 'Harvest Soup' event where students get to enjoy the tasty benefits of their pocket farm. The garden has been incorporated into various classroom curriculums as well. The large Russian sunflower seed heads are used during a math activity, and then as part of the environmental science activity and feeding of small animals and birds. The garden is maintained over the summer months by school families who are rewarded for their efforts by harvesting the ripened veggies for their own use.

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