



SUMMER IN THE GARDEN

School gardens are unique places and it's important for us to remember that what works for a home garden doesn't necessarily work for a school garden. Summer is prime growing time and also when many of our students and teachers are away, resting and rejuvenating for another year of learning and fun.

This encourages us all to be creative in how we manage a school garden in the summer.

Connect with a Summer School Program or Lead your Own

Use your school garden as the focus of a summer school class. Explore plants, soils, insects, ecology, and even cooking while growing fresh food. If teaching summer school doesn't work for your schedule, you can always connect with another teacher willing to teach out of the garden and help keep it healthy and maintained through the summer.

Get Connected with College Students, Churches, or Community Organizations

Our local colleges may have agriculture students who would be excited for the opportunity to work on a project for personal experience and/or to gain some credit hours. This arrangement can be set up however works best for the garden, teacher, and college student. Students can takeover entirely for the summer, work with the teachers, support summer school classes, etc. Be creative in this relationship, but be sure that expectations are clear for all parties involved.

You also may find help from local churches, the neighborhood association in your area, Springfield Community Gardens, or from local parents and PTA members. There are several options such as a rotating maintenance schedule for families or organizations, adopt-a-bed, or large work-days.

Cover Crop your Beds

Cover crops help protect our soils from erosion, suppress weeds, and provide organic matter to replenish our soil. If nobody will be using your garden for 6 weeks or more, you may want to explore cover cropping as a way to keep your beds tidy, well-fed, and less weedy. While you'll miss out on long-season, heat-loving crops with this method, you'll be ready to plant once school comes back in session with short-season, cool-lovers like lettuces, spinach, greens, kales, etc.



Make Your Garden as Low Maintenance as Possible

Two main ways to help reduce garden maintenance are to keep the weeds down and keep your plants watered.

Mulching helps suppress weeds, moderate soil temperature, and help conserve moisture, helping us water less. Mulches can be straw, cocoa husks, shredded leaves, dried grass clippings, or even landscape fabrics and weed barrier cloths. The organic materials listed above helps feed the soil as it breaks down while also keeping the weeds from being able to make it through the thick layer. Be generous with the amount of mulch you're putting down and be aware the depth of the mulch will shrink due to settling and decomposition.

Do not mound the mulch around the plants, give them a couple of inches of room around their base to limit the pest habitat and keep air moving around them.

Watering can become a burden during hot, dry times in the Ozarks. Drip tape and soaker hoses help deliver water directly to the soil. It reduces water loss due to evaporation, and helps reduce disease by keeping plant leaves dry. Timers can help water on a schedule and early in the morning (the best time of day) without disturbing anyone's sleep.

PRO TIP:

Start making your Summer Plan over the winter. January and February are great times to start a garden plan that includes your intentions for the upcoming summer. Whether that be developing a class for summer school, finding a college student, or solidifying a group to be the caretakers.