

Urban Community School, Cleveland, Ohio

Urban Community School’s garden program is alive and well. Each of 15 classrooms tends a garden box in an area surrounded by perennials. Students’ excitement for the garden grew over the winter along with the seedlings they nurtured. With the arrival of spring, they planted, made scarecrows, and sited benches for an outdoor classroom. On Earth Day, first and fourth grades participated in lessons related to nature, working the soil, and “waking up” the garden.

One goal of this exceptional garden program is to increase the learning and working space in the garden. With the generous assistance of Smith & Hawken, the school purchased a variety of gardening equipment, and in November, 300 students in grades K-8 participated in a full day of gardening activities to expand their gardens. Students also had more garden-based lessons this year, and more time for outdoor exploration, play, and respite.



The school developed a native and heirloom garden to further the lesson of “right plant, right place.” Garden coordinator Thomas Tompkins seized this opportunity to address the real-world issues of climate change and watershed preservation, and he modeled the value of critical thinking and environmental stewardship.

Poised to take the next step towards sustainability the school is developing partnerships with local experts and organizations. It has registered with Green City Blue Lake, a nonprofit dedicated to raising sustainability practices for Northeast Ohio. Ohio State University Extension will educate students about stormwater abatement, and plans to install a rainwater catchment system to handle roof runoff. Interested in actualizing community involvement, Thomas organized a forum with parents, students, staff, and neighbors to discuss a large-scale water diversion program and the launch of a large worm composting system. The panel includes experts from the Soil and Water Conservation District, a landscaper, a rain barrel expert, an enthusiastic local food chef, and an organic gardener.

Through unique encounters like these, students at Urban Community School recognize the need to reduce human impact on the earth, learn to research and implement low-tech solutions, and develop negotiating skills that come with a community-oriented mindset. The process is reinforcing their ownership of their garden program and their stake in the community building process.

ASG PROGRAM SPONSOR
for Edna Maguire School



IN THE GARDEN SINCE 1979

Teachers are excited about the ‘new’ gardens being fed by rainwater and cisterns that we fill periodically from the hydrant. We solidified relationships with community gardeners who are expert at rainwater usage, sheet mulching, and the use of food scraps for composting. We’ve learned a lot about organic materials and the use of worms to improve plant vitality.

— Thomas Tompkins
1st and 2nd grade teacher
and garden program co-leader

Adopt a School Garden Program



Adopt a School Garden (ASG) is a program of the National Gardening Association, 1100 Dorset St., South Burlington, VT 05403, (800) 538-7476. To learn more about ASG and the nonprofit National Gardening Association, please visit: www.garden.org/asg

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WE ATE OUR OWN PRODUCE!
Last fall, the children ate green beans and lettuce grown from the garden.
 — Thomas Tompkins
 1st/2nd grade teacher, garden program co-leader



The National Gardening Association requires recipient schools in the Adopt a School Garden® program to submit a formal evaluation to capture quantitative and qualitative data on the donation’s impact. The following is a summary of the responses from the **Urban Community School** in Cleveland, Ohio.

Hours per week students participated in gardening activities:

Average2-3 hours/week
 Program duration6 months/year

Number and age/grade of Garden Club participants:

Ages 2-5 (pre-K)65
 Ages 6-8 (gr. 1-3)145
 Ages 9-11 (gr. 4-5)140
 Ages 12-13 (gr. 6-7)85
 Total children involved435

Eligible for free or reduced lunch.....75%

Demographic information

Latino40%
 European American.....35%
 African American25%

Program continuation:.....yes

Subjects emphasized in the gardening program:

Science
 Health and Nutrition
 Interdisciplinary
 Social Studies
 Intra/Interpersonal Relations
 Arts
 English

Program leader’s estimate of student improvements due to involvement in the garden program. Scale: 0 (no change) to 10 (dramatic response):

Community spirit.....10
 Exercise:9
 Attendance.....7

Enthusiasm for learning.....7
 Environmental stewardship.....7
 Volunteerism.....7
 Social skills6
 Leadership skills5
 Self-confidence.....5

ASG program award utilization:

Urban Community School used Smith & Hawken’s donation for the following materials and services:
 – humus, soil, and straw
 – heirloom plants
 – oak tree
 – composting worms
 – potting materials and seeds
 – drip irrigation tubing
 – rain barrels
 – 5 garden curriculum resources

Obstacles faced:

The biggest challenge for Urban Community School was working with staff and teachers — with varying levels of interest and motivation — to create and facilitate rich instructional experiences in the garden.

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Publicity:

Garden activities were promoted in the school newsletter.

Financial support for the garden granted in addition to the ASG contribution:

\$100–\$250

Approximate value of in-kind donations to garden program:

\$500–\$1,000



The ASG relationship pushed me to learn more about the Earth. I went from trying to lead planting lessons for students to embarking on a journey towards bringing permaculture to our urban landscape. I think these concepts will now deepen in our school, and we teachers will become more expert at connecting students to the Earth, and going far beyond putting seedlings in the ground.

— Thomas Tompkins
1st and 2nd grade teacher
and garden program co-leader



Our garden has almost doubled to more than 1,000 square feet. It changed dramatically from a plant-and-water garden of vegetables to a rain-fed, organically composted garden.

— Thomas Tompkins
1st/2nd grade teacher, garden program co-leader



Students love to work in the garden. Heavy labor, such as moving soil, is tops, followed by weeding.

— Thomas Tompkins
1st/2nd grade teacher, garden program
co-leader