

Austin Area School Garden Collaborative Harvest Guide

PURPOSE: To provide clear guidance and standards to K-12 school garden programs and communities on various options for distributing the harvest from school gardens in the Austin area that can be used as a statewide model. This will take form through case studies, step by step guides and various resources.

There are various methods of harvest distribution. Our team has organized this guide into three categories:

1. On-site Consumption
 - School cafeterias
 - Classroom tastings

2. Direct Marketing
 - Community supported agriculture
 - Farm stands
 - Farmers markets
 - Restaurants

3. Donations
 - Nonprofit or community based organizations, such as emergency food pantries
 - Sent home with students

ON-SITE CONSUMPTION

SCHOOL CAFETERIAS

AISD Garden to Café Standards:

- Only pre-washed herbs and whole produce that can be eaten raw
- For service the day following delivery
 - For large deliveries, please try to plan in advance. Talk with your Café Manager about their produce order and delivery days. If the café knows in advance what items the garden will deliver they can adjust their produce order to avoid waste.
- For vegetables: Café Manager will either replace line item with same color vegetable or serve tasting portion as an extra to the reimbursable meal. If vegetables should be served to a particular class or grade please discuss with Café Manager at or before time of delivery.
- For herbs: Café Manager will sub garden herbs for purchased herbs in a standard recipe or add garden herbs as makes sense to existing recipe or use for salad topping.

Produce regularly menued in our Cafes:

Broccoli	Cucumber	Tomatoes
Cabbage	Lettuce	Watermelon
Cantaloupe	Peas	Zucchini
Corn	Summer Squash	

For items other than those listed above please reach out to your Café Manager or the District Chef in advance. Food service may be able to bring in the District Chef for special recipes and cooking demos.

CLASSROOM TASTINGS

Classroom tastings should follow food safety protocols as detailed in the [School Garden Harvest Guide](#). Produce should be prepared and consumed in the classroom on the same day as harvest. Use of cutting tools should be managed by the classroom teacher according to student age and ability. Food tastings should not count as a meal and must be small servings. As always, the classroom teacher should be aware of any student allergies or food restrictions.

An example of a typical classroom food tasting can involve several steps: Students and teacher select and harvest produce from the garden. The produce is washed in the classroom. Teacher (or older students) chop (process) the produce. Students taste a small portion of the produce raw and then with other variables (i.e. olive oil, vinegar.) Students can then do written reflection on taste, texture and preference.

Learn, Grow, Eat, Go!

DIRECT MARKETING

COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE (CSA)

The CSA serves to financially sustain the garden by accepting monetary “donations” from teachers from the host school who then receive a garden harvest either weekly or biweekly (however often harvest is available). In the particular case of the CSA at Austin High school, teachers donate \$20 at the beginning of each semester. The garden club coordinator works with the school bookkeeper to open a garden club budget account. Best practice is that CSA dues are deposited into this account. In order to buy supplies, the garden coordinator must get a quote from a vendor and submit a purchase approval request form to obtain a check to pay for the supplies. This system allows for transparency, particularly regarding large dollar purchases (e.g. irrigation system). The garden club coordinator sends a weekly email to all CSA members and garden club student volunteers, outlining the duties for the Friday morning work hour and the work that was accomplished the previous workday. Friday morning is the weekly work hour that occurs starting at 8 a.m., during this time the garden club student volunteers will plant, harvest, and wash the crops, pull weeds in the garden beds, turn the compost, water, and other necessary chores to be done in the garden. The students take home whatever they want from the harvest and what is left over gets divided up between the CSA contributing

teachers. A typical CSA delivery will be a plastic bag with 20 leaves of leafy greens (e.g. Swiss chard), a note with the teacher's name and room number and a brief explanation of the contents of the bag. Over the last year, 8 teachers received 170 pounds of produce throughout the year. In the case of Austin High, we are experimenting with contributing teachers paying at the beginning of each semester (fall/spring) versus accepting donations in September for the full academic year. The teachers at Austin High have been pleased with the value of the CSA in years past.

FARM STANDS

Farm stands are an academically rigorous and fun way to distribute garden produce to the greater school community. Farm stands can be held directly after dismissal and are most enriching when run by the students themselves. Produce can be sold or donated to patrons and revenue can be used to fund the campus garden. Food safety practices as outlined in the [School Garden Harvest Guide](#) should be followed whenever distributing food items.

Farm stands should be well organized in advance. Students should be encouraged to help with the planning. Planning should include: determining pricing, method of payment (Square or other online payment method are fairly easy to set up), unit size, local advertising (i.e. posters, announcement in school newsletters.), and gathering of materials (tables, paper bags, twine, and various containers).

FARMERS MARKETS

In collaboration with local non-profit organizations such as the Sustainable Food Center, schools can arrange for one time access to a seller's table at local farmers markets. For a more permanent farmers market presence, individual campuses would need to apply for space at specific markets.

RESTAURANTS

Local businesses can be a great resource for school gardens. In the case of Zilker Elementary, a local restaurant sponsors their garden and holds an annual fundraiser for the garden's upkeep. Other examples of private-public partnership include the selling of produce to restaurants. These relationships can be a win-win, helping gardens fund themselves and giving exposure to local businesses that care about school gardens.

DONATIONS

NON-PROFITS/FOOD PANTRY

Fresh, nutritious, unprocessed food is in short supply at many food pantries and resource shelters. Sustainable Food Center has compiled a list of local, basic needs providers in the greater Austin area who have the capacity to accept fresh garden produce to distribute or add to healthy meals for their clients. These providers can store fresh produce adequately and safely. Schools can establish a relationship with a local provider nearby who can become a regular partner in accepting fresh produce from the school garden. This provides students and

the garden team a valuable experience of giving back to the community through sharing their healthy produce. Here are basic steps to donating produce from your garden:

- [Consult Sustainable Food Center's list of food pantries that accept fresh produce](#)
- Call food pantry to assess need for fresh produce and confirm their capacity to accept it
- Schedule a time to deliver the produce
- If possible, weigh the produce in advance and record what types of fruits and vegetables were donated (keep track for future reference)
- Follow up with the food pantry to see how the produce was used and if there is further interest in accepting produce donations

Below are examples of school gardens that have donated fresh garden produce to local service providers.

In summer of 2013, the Graham Elementary school garden led a “3 Sisters” garden planting that yielded a large harvest throughout the summer, while the garden was still being tended by volunteers. The school gardeners donated their harvest to The Serving Center, a food pantry located near the home of one of the volunteers. In total, they donated 40 pounds of produce: yellow and green squash, okra, herbs, and a few other summer vegetables. The Serving Center provided a scale to weigh the produce. During the school year, the school had donated produce from the garden to students, teachers, or staff, but that year the team kept the garden going throughout the summer, so the garden yielded more produce that volunteers were able to harvest and donate.

During 2013-2014, Oak Hill Elementary created “The Giving Garden” through a Sodexo grant received by a student. The food garden was cared for by students and teachers through the gardening club. Any leftover produce that was not given to those in need or used for a healthy cooking demonstration in the classroom was donated to the Caritas Soup Kitchen. During the summer months of June-August, the student garden leader harvested and donated 36 pounds of fresh sweet potatoes, cucumbers, eggplant, and tomatoes. A teacher or parents drove the student to deliver the produce bi-weekly. The Caritas Soup Kitchen had a receiving dock where they accepted the bags of produce.

In Spring 2016, Sunset Valley Elementary established a student-led garden supported by a grant through Katie's Krops. As part of the grant requirement, the school garden produce will be donated each planting season to a local organization of the student garden leader's choice. The student garden leader recently had his first harvest and donated to the Central Texas Food Bank, delivering the produce in person.

In May of 2014, the Becker Elementary school garden, the “Becker Green Classroom”, donated garden produce on behalf of the garden and the City of Austin's Earth Camp that was held there. They donated lettuce, Swiss chard, and spinach to the St. Vincent de Paul food pantry nearby. A school garden volunteer dropped off the produce without contacting the pantry in advance, but the pantry accepted the donation and expressed thanks. Since it was organic produce, there were some insects on the greens; however, it did not cause any issues.

SENT HOME WITH STUDENTS OR COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Lanier High School has a unique school and community food garden. The garden is primarily run by students in the Future Farmers of America agricultural program, but it is a part of a larger community garden that serves refugees through the Multicultural Refugee Coalition. Refugees tend their own family plots and collaborate with students on wider garden projects. The student-led portion of the garden occasionally has a surplus of produce, especially during the summertime. Students have found that harvesting the excess produce and leaving baskets outside of the fence, or next to the track where families walk in the evenings, is a successful way of providing the community with fresh, healthy food. They have even assessed which vegetables were more popular and grown more of the kinds of vegetables the community members preferred to eat while reducing the type of vegetables grown that were less popular. In doing so, they gave back to the community while also finding a viable outlet for excess produce that would otherwise go unused in the garden.