

Santa Clara County School Garden Resource Guide

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Gardening has become a popular activity in elementary and middle schools. Many schools have established gardens on their grounds to teach elements of biology while actively growing food and flowers. Teachers and parent volunteers in Santa Clara County have turned increasingly to UC Cooperative Extension personnel and Master Gardeners for help with various aspects of their gardening projects. In spring of 1997, the School Garden Response Team (SGRT), comprised of six Master Gardener volunteers, was organized to respond to this growing number of requests for advice and assistance. This group soon realized that a comprehensive resource guide was needed to facilitate their efforts.

Goals and Objectives

The extent of interest in school gardens and the types of problems and issues needing assistance could best be determined through a survey of public schools. Nancy Garrison, Master Gardener Carol McElroy and Rosa Maria Gordillo developed and distributed a school garden survey to each of the 386 public schools in Santa Clara County. Working with UC Cooperative Extension in San Mateo County, the survey was also sent to every public school there. The survey requested information about garden size, types of plant material, integration into the curriculum, funding sources and future plans. Garden maintenance responsibilities, level of community support and challenges faced during garden establishment were also addressed by the survey. The information obtained from the survey would be used to validate the need for a school garden guide, to influence its contents and to better focus the efforts of the SGRT.

Discussion

Over 90 schools responded to the school garden survey including some schools without gardens. From these responses it is estimated that at least one third of the public schools in Santa Clara County have gardens. The survey results enabled the SGRT to identify specific information needs that could be best addressed in the format of a comprehensive resource guide. Topics such as choosing the best garden site, gardening organizations offering advice, funding sources, garden supplies



Figure 1. Cover logo for the Santa Clara County School Garden Resource Guide.

and equipment, educational and reference materials on gardening and public and private gardens available to visit became the focus of the 60-page *Santa Clara County School Garden Resource Guide* (Figure 1).

The *School Garden Resource Guide* (SGRG) has been distributed to the 75 schools who responded to the October 1998 garden survey and requested the guide. Over 60 additional teachers throughout Santa Clara County and beyond requested the guide in response to an article in the San Jose Mercury newspaper in early September 1999. The Cooperative Extension office and the SGRT have also distributed the guide to 50 individual teachers. Of the 275 copies printed with Slosson Foundation funding, all but 50 copies have been distributed. The San Jose Mercury newspaper has also printed and distributed an additional 60 copies free of charge. They will continue to print and distribute the *School Garden Resource Guide* with their Back to School Kit, as long as requests come in. Requests received by the newspaper are being tracked to identify interested groups.

The *School Garden Resource Guide* will soon appear on the Web site: www.mastergardeners.org and will be sent to every district office in Santa Clara County. Every public school will be informed of the guide's availability through their district office or from the San Jose Mercury newspaper by requesting the 'School Garden Kit'.

As expected, the Guide is a crucial tool for the SGRT to make available to schools and has been very well

received by home gardeners who have seen it. This guide may also prove useful as a model for other Cooperative Extension personnel throughout the state who are involved in school gardens.

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