

Create a School Garden Business

Overview: Creating a school garden business can be an exciting venture for students offering real-world challenges and benefits. As students work through the planning and implementation stages, they draw upon the knowledge they have learned in their classes and translate that information into practical job skills. They have opportunities to be creative, practice teamwork, and gain confidence. This lesson provides guidance for helping your students create a simple business plan.



Grade Level/Range: Grades 6 to 12

Objective: Students will gain practical job skills by creating a plan for a school garden business.

Time: 1 to 2 weeks

Materials:

- Dry erase or chalkboard
- Paper and pencils

Background Information:

School gardens offer the opportunity to create entrepreneurial projects, which in turn allow youth to step into leadership roles and gain valuable job experience. Whether youth participate in a formally coordinated internship program or pilot a creative business model as part of a more informal project, they can gain a wide array of work-readiness skills through garden-inspired businesses. This provides kids not only with gardening know-how and real world business experience, but also the means to raise funds for their school or community. Potential products include the sale of fruits, vegetables, herbs, and flowers through a venue such as a Farmers' Market or the manufacturing of a value-added product such as herbal soaps, jars of salsa, or cut flower arrangements.

There are many different ways to organize a youth garden business. Funds collected can be invested back into the garden program to help maintain and sustain the gardens. Conversely, the funds raised can be used to pay the participating youth, giving them a true sense of ownership in the business. This decision will likely be informed by your motivations for starting a business in the first place. Are you looking to fundraise for your school garden program in a creative and engaging way? If that's the case, then you might just have students volunteer their time and then allocate any profits directly to a garden fund. Or are you looking to provide youth with a more formal work-and-learn experience? If so, then you'll have to consider how to fund this type of program and how to pay your student employees.

No matter how you organize your youth garden business, the result is the same—youth get real-life experiences that will help them as they grow into adults.

Here are a few ideas of products created by and services offered by youth garden programs as part of a school garden business to help with your own brainstorming:

- Vegetables, herbs, and flowers (for farmers' market, vegetable stand, stores or restaurants)
- Vegetable craft items (chili pepper ropes, braided garlic)
- Garden seedlings
- Canned goods (salsa, tomato sauce, salad dressing, jam, pickles, soup)
- Herb and herb crafts (potpourri, vinegar, pillows, catnip mice, soap)
- Dried flower and/or herb bouquets (tied with ribbon and wrapped in tissue paper)
- Greenhouse-grown ornamentals (poinsettia, aloe)
- Pressed flower cards and placemats
- Homemade paper note cards
- Wreaths with herbs and/or flowers
- Fresh floral arrangements
- Homemade plant pots
- Seed saved from the school garden (in student-designed packets)
- Worm composting kits with directions
- Bagged worm compost
- Indoor plant care services
- School garden design services (creating a butterfly garden)

Laying the Groundwork:

The first challenge for your student entrepreneurs to tackle is to identify a product or service that is in demand and likely to be a hit. Begin by letting them brainstorm freely. Avoid evaluating the ideas as they pop up and remind them that no idea is a bad idea at this stage.

Once you are tapped out on ideas, go back and assess your possibilities. Through a practical lens, create a second list of the business ideas that you think are reasonable to accomplish with the time and resources you have available. Ask, what do we have the capacity to do? Once this second list is completed, allow students to vote on their favorites.

Next take the top 3 to 5 ideas and create a market research survey (or multiple surveys if that makes more sense) to distribute to your potential customers which may include other students, teachers, parents or the community. Typically multiple choice and short answer questions are best. [Click here to view a sample market research survey that was created for a school garden pressed flower card business.](#) Conclude by compiling the data collected.

Exploration:

1. Ask students to create a simple business plan around one or more of the ideas proposed in the Laying the Groundwork. By analyzing the results of the market research survey, you may be able to identify one idea that you think is the most viable business option and you can work on one business plan as a class. Alternatively, if you are still not sure what idea would work best, you can break into teams and create business plans to fully investigate all your options. [Click here to download a handout from Growing Ventures: Starting a School Garden Business to guide the process.](#)

2. Once the business plans are finished, ask students to create a presentation to share their plans with the rest of the class. If possible invite teachers, administrators or parents to hear the presentations.

3. Finally, discuss the plan or plans and decide if you want to move forward with your school garden business. Create a list of all the tasks that need to be completed to turn your business into a reality and create job descriptions for each role. Students can then be assigned different jobs (either by volunteering or through an interview process) or they can rotate to help with each job so they can understand every aspect of the business.

Making Connections:

Even if you determine you do not have the capacity to start a school garden business at this time, you can still develop promotional materials to practice your communication and persuasive writing skills.

Begin by brainstorming a list of successful ad campaigns. Ask students to discuss why they think these campaigns appeal to them. Then ask them to consider the following questions:

- How will we get our customers' attention and convince them to buy our product(s) or services?
- How can we make our product seem too good to pass up?
- What can we say about how it meets their needs?
- What distinguishes us?
- Where shall we advertise?

Develop a pitch for your product. Brainstorm words or phrases that you think would capture your customers' attention. Here are some ideas of the ways that other school garden businesses have advertised their products:

- Commercials on school announcements
- Notice or ad in the school or community newspaper
- Letters, flyers, and coupons distributed to parents and community members
- Flyers or posters posted around school, at a local library or other community bulletin boards
- Business cards
- School website or Facebook page

Create the materials as team or individuals and share for feedback.

Branching Out:

- Connect with your community. Invite a representative from your local farmers' market or CSA to speak to the class about the challenges of running an agriculturally-based business.
- Explore the many types of jobs available in the field of horticulture. Visit the Seed Your Future website to get started at:
<http://www.seedyourfuture.org/horticulture-careers>