

SPEC School Garden Calendar

This guide is designed for educators who plan to do indoor and outdoor gardening during the school year. It includes suggested complementary activities that relate to food and nature.

September

Garden Tasks

- Get to know the garden (scavenger hunt, tour)
- Establish Outdoor Classroom code of conduct / garden rules
- Get each student to start a Nature / Garden Journal
- Harvest tomatoes, beans, beets, carrots, fruit (whatever was grown during summer)
- Remove summer plants that are finished and will not produce more food
- Save seeds from dried seed pods or fruiting plants (ex. Pumpkins, tomatoes, cucumbers) for next year (SPEC Lesson 5)
- **Plant** cold hardy leafy greens: spinach, lettuce & mesclun mix, kale, swiss chard, boc choi, gai lan, (mustard), (arugula) directly into soil outdoors - Note: items in brackets are ones fewer students have developed palate for)
- **Plant** radishes, carrots, peas, sprouting broccoli such as purple sprouting broccoli and broccoli raab directly outdoors
- Notes: These fall plantings will over-winter and be ready in the spring. Radishes, peas, and some greens will be ready in late Fall if planted in early to mid-September.

Related Activities

- Fall Harvest Celebration
- Make smoothies, pizza, salads from harvested food
- Harvest herbs, flowers, leaves to make potpourri, bouquets or other art projects

October

Garden Tasks

- Harvest remainder of summer crops and remove finished plants. Chop and place finished plants in compost.

- Invite local community group or organization for a big cleanup before winter
- Remove and store stakes or other equipment not in use.
- Save seeds (SPEC Lesson 5)
- Collect leaves and cover bare soil and place around plants (SPEC Lesson 6) – This “mulch” protects soil over winter, prevents leaching of nutrients, adds organic matter to soil, promotes healthy soil micro-organisms which enrich the soil for next spring. Place sticks on top of leaves so wind doesn't carry them away.
- **Plant** garlic in first two weeks of October
- **Plant** cover crops (field peas, clover, fava bean) in vacant spaces. These crops will hold soil and nutrients over the winter, and add nitrogen and organic matter to soil in the spring. Do not plant vetch or winter rye cover crops as these crops are difficult to get out of the garden.

Related Activities

Outdoor

- Explore soil and earthworms (SPEC Lessons 1, 2, 3)
- Go for nature walks to find examples of seeds in nature, or observe and journal
- Collect fallen pinecones, acorns, and other seeds in nature

Indoor

- Fall Harvest Celebration
- Learn about seeds and seed dispersal (SPEC Lesson 4)

November

Garden Tasks

- Harvest lightly any leafy greens or radishes planted in September
- **Plant** cover crops

Related Activities

Outdoor

- Learn about soil, make a classroom composter (SPEC Lessons 1, 2, 3)

Indoor

- Process, package seeds. Decorate and create seed packets (SPEC Lesson 5)
- Clean mason bee cocoons with a Native Pollinator expert
- Canning, making preserved foods with seasonal vegetables

December

Garden Tasks

- Harvest lightly from leafy greens
- Harvest herbs (rosemary, thyme) for holiday gifts, bouquets

Related Activities

- Process and package seeds. Decorate and create seed packets.

January

Garden Tasks

- Garden Planning Session (SPEC Lesson 9)
- Source seeds & materials needed for spring planting

Related Activities

- Nutrition lessons and activities

February

Garden Tasks

- Uproot cover crops and turn into soil 1 month before planting. You can also wait until planting, cut the cover crops at base (where the stems meet the soil) and put them into compost.
- Remove leaves placed on soil as mulch over winter right before direct sowing.

- Add finished compost to the garden.
- **Plant** indoor seedlings/starts (with a grow light & timer, or by a sunny window) – kale, swiss chard, purple sprouting broccoli, broccoli raab, herbs, lettuce, spinach, bok choy, gai lan
- **Plant** (direct sow outdoors) peas, kale, carrots, radishes, beets, turnips, swiss chard, bok choy, gai lan, salad greens/mesclun, daikon, calendula, nasturtium, marigolds, insect/butterfly/bee/native/pollinator flower blends outside at the end of the month if it's a mild Spring. Otherwise, wait until after Spring Break.
- Note: Always direct sow (directly into garden outdoors) rooting vegetables such as carrots, beets, radishes, turnips; Also direct sow native flower blends. Everything else can be started indoors or direct sowed outdoors.

Related Activities

- Buy and taste a variety of vegetables that can be planted in spring, explore parts of a plant and brainstorm what to grow (SPEC Lesson 9)
- Create garden plans and dream garden designs
- Create signage & vegetable markers for garden beds

March

Garden Tasks

- Harvest winter greens
- Cut down cover crops (if did not turn in Feb). Chop and put in compost.
- Remove leaves placed on soil as mulch over winter right before direct sowing.
- Stir in organic fertilizer like Gaia Green and/or finished compost to all garden beds before planting
- Make trellis for peas (which will serve for the beans once the peas are done) – There are many design ideas on the internet. An easy design is a pyramid made with 3 bamboo sticks.

Plant Outdoors:

- Early season potatoes in large pots before spring break (leave 1/2 empty for adding soil later, as plants grow)

- Peas, parsley, radishes, lettuce - Basically any green leafy vegetables, root vegetables, and peas can be planted directly outdoors as seeds or seedlings before spring break unless it is an unusually cold spring. If it's very cold, wait until after spring break to plant these cold hardy crops.
- Transplant seedlings started indoors after 4 to 5 weeks of growing indoors under growlights. For a few days before planting, place tray outside for a few hours to get them used to outside weather (hardening).
- Pollinator flowers (SPEC Lesson 7)

Plant Indoors – After spring break:

- Cilantro, basil, and any fruiting vegetables, such as tomatoes, zucchini, cucumber, pepper, winter squash, pumpkin. Try uncommon varieties like heirloom tomatoes, “lemon cucumber”, purple bell pepper, and pattypan or scallop squash.

Related Activities

- Build mason bee house

April

Garden Tasks

- Clear beds of finished plants, chop and put in compost.
- Compost: Build up green & brown layers of plants, newspaper, food scraps, grass, leaves. Turn once a week

Plant Outdoors:

- Root vegetables (carrots, beets, radishes)
- Leafy greens (lettuce, salad, kale, chard, spinach, arugula) & herbs (chives, parsley)
- Summer pollinator-friendly flowers (SPEC Lesson 7)
- Transplant any ready indoor seedlings.
- If there is no rain, deep water twice a week. To ensure water has penetrated deep enough, place finger two inches into soil to detect if moist all the way through.

Plant Indoors:

- Cilantro, basil, and any fruiting vegetables, such as tomatoes, zucchini, cucumber, pepper, winter squash, pumpkin. Place tray next to sunny windowsill or use a growlight & timer.

Related Activities

Outdoor

- Create a bee fountain (shallow bowl filled with marbles & water, plus flat pieces of wood for pollinators to land and drink water. Place near flowers)
- Learn about water & water conservation, visit nearby watersheds & former waterways.

Indoor

- Begin creating a plan for summer maintenance (if growing during summer). Collaborate with parents, neighbours, community, day care, organizations, interns, volunteers.
- Start seedlings for Mother's Day – try marigold

May

Garden Tasks

- **Plant** fruiting vegetables, beans, herbs, and if not already planted, root vegetables. Fruiting vegetables can be started as seedlings indoors, but beans and root vegetables should always be planted directly into the garden from seed.
- **Plant** strawberry plants / seedlings, raspberry canes, blueberry plants etc.
- Transplant indoor seedlings
- Harvest and replant radishes, leafy greens
- Water and weed
- Top up potato bins with more soil around the growing steps. Add soil up to one inch from top of bin.

Related Activities

Outdoor

- Look for and observe insects, learn about pollinators & beneficial insects (SPEC Lesson 8)

- Explore everyday beneficial or edible 'weeds' (dandelion, plantain, chickweed)
- Visit native plant garden and research native plants

Indoor

- Harvest herbs to make herb vinegars & oils for salad dressing (ex. chive blossom vinegar)
- Harvest woody herbs for Mother's Day bouquets (thyme, rosemary, sage)
- Plan end of year harvest celebration
- Send fruiting vegetable seedlings (tomato, cucumber, squash) home, or plant in garden

June

Garden Tasks

- Harvest potatoes, salad, kale, radishes, carrots, beets
- Harvest strawberries and any other ripe berries from previous years
- If not growing summer vegetables, pull out finished plants, or
- **Replant** vegetables as well as flowers

Related Activities

Outdoor

- Visit nearby nature sanctuary or learning garden
- Release butterflies (or go on a fieldtrip to take part in a release)

Indoor

- Make salad dressing with herb vinegars & oils
- End of year harvest celebration
- Send remaining indoor seedlings home
- Reflection on garden program, feedback for next year
- Confirm summer maintenance & watering schedule with volunteer parents, youth, community members

Summer: Optional

Garden Tasks

- **Plant** fall pumpkins, winter squash, turnips, cabbage, brussel sprouts, chard in late July
- Ensure garden is deeply watered 2-3 times per week at minimum during summer, and weeded 2-4 times per month or more
- Harvest vegetables planted in spring

Resources

Green Thumbs at School: SPEC Food Garden Lesson Book:

<http://lifecyclesproject.ca/app/uploads/2015/08/Patterns-Through-the-Seasons.pdf>

Other school garden and BC curriculum linking resources on SPEC website:

<http://spec.bc.ca/school-gardens>

Growing Gardens (school garden resources): <https://www.growing-gardens.org/>

LifeCycles: Patterns Through the Seasons:

<http://lifecyclesproject.ca/app/uploads/2015/08/Patterns-Through-the-Seasons.pdf>

Life Lab: School Garden Resources: <http://www.lifelab.org/for-educators/schoolgardens/>

Vancouver School Food Network: <https://vancouverschoolfoodnetwork.wordpress.com/>

The Edible Schoolyard: <https://edibleschoolyard.org/node/17404>

Think&EatGreen@School: <https://thinkeatgreen.ca/resources/>

West Coast Seeds Regional Planting Charts:

<https://www.westcoastseeds.com/pages/regional-planting-charts>