

The Top 10 Cool Season Plants For School Gardens

Broccoli: Easiest grown from transplants but can be started from seed as well. Harvest while buds are small and unopened. Eat raw or steamed and dip in salad dressing or soy sauce. Try it both ways and let the students vote on their favorite. Let some of the broccoli go to flower and taste the flowers – they're delicious!

Carrots: Sow seeds directly in the garden. Germination takes 2 to 3 weeks and soil must stay moist during this time. The carrot bed can be covered until seeds sprout to keep it from drying out. When harvesting, loosen the soil with a digging fork and have a vegetable scrubber handy.

Celery: The celery you grow in the garden probably won't taste very good and may be stringy – it needs a long cool season and blanching to achieve best flavor and texture. However, it is a very interesting plant to observe in the garden and the leaves are flavorful.

Herbs: Chives, parsley and cilantro are easy to grow. Students can sample these herbs along with lettuce to experience different flavors among edible leaves.

Lettuce: Leaf lettuce can be harvested a few leaves at a time off each plant. Students can add some grated carrot and radish along with some edible flower petals for an exciting salad. Watch for slugs and snails – no escargot in the salad please!

Onions/Bulbs: Onions and flower bulbs make a nice display and the flowers can be picked for classroom arrangements. At the end of the school year, use a digging fork to take up the flower bulbs to replant next year. The onions can be harvested when the leaves are fully withered.

Peas: Peas are easy to grow from seed in the garden. Snap and snow peas with edible pods grown on a support (3 foot min. height) are a lot of fun for students to harvest and eat raw directly from the vines. To harvest, have students hold the vine with one hand while pulling on the pod with the other. Sweet peas can be grown for the flowers but the pods are not edible and can be toxic if a large number are eaten.

Radish: Plant seeds directly in the garden. Watch radish closely as it matures quickly; it should be harvested when it is 1 to 1 ½ inches in diameter. Eat raw, grate over lettuce or serve with salad dressing for dipping.

Zucchini: Zucchini is a warm season vegetable that grows and produces fruit very quickly so it can be a successful addition to the school garden. Plant seeds or transplants in early spring. Zucchini bread is always a classroom favorite.

Wild Flowers: California poppies and other wild flowers are beautiful and attract pollinators and beneficial insects. Flowers with edible petals such as violas, pansies, nasturtiums and calendulas are an excellent addition to the school garden. Sunflowers may do well if planted while the soil is still warm in late summer.

Notes: Unless otherwise noted, the plants listed above should be started in fall and winter. These plants all do best in full sun. Prepare beds before planting; soil should be loose, amended, fertilized and moist. Do not use pesticides in an edible garden. Reclaimed water can not be used on edibles. If growing seeds, follow package instructions for depth of seed planting. Soil must be kept moist for seeds to germinate and for satisfactory plant performance. Let some of each crop 'go to seed' so students can see the complete plant growth cycle. Other cool season crops to consider include: beets, cabbage, cauliflower, chard, endive, kale, spinach, strawberries and turnips.