

## Which veggies should we grow in our school garden?



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Using your space wisely in your School Garden can be challenging for new gardeners. Maximizing your yields with kid-friendly veggies is normally the goal of most school gardens that are being used as outdoor classrooms, but each situation is unique! You may have a space that is used more as a production garden to get veggies into your classroom or you may be growing specifically to feed families/community members in their homes. If these are the case, your choices will be more specific to your situation and goals.

We have created this list of annual veggies we recommend for your school garden if it is mainly used as an outdoor classroom to maximize the amount of veggies that you get and the amount of kiddos you can give them to. This list is based on what we do in Missoula, so mainly gardening zone 5, so you may have to vary your planting to suit your zone if it is different.

### Highly Recommended:

- **Carrots:** pickable by kids, you can plant so many!
- **Cherry/grape tomatoes:** pickable by kids, high yields, and bite size = super kid-friendly, can be relay-cropped.
- **Snap Peas (sugar or snow):** pickable by kids, high yields, and bite size = super kid-friendly, can be relay-cropped.
- **Cucumbers:** high yields, easy to cut up into small pieces while in the garden.
- **Zucchini/Summer Squash:** high yields, easy to cut up into small pieces while in the garden.
- **Spinach:** pickable by kids, grows well in early spring, can be relay-cropped early or late.
- **Kale:** pickable by kids, produces early and can last the whole season, the most cold hardy vegetable.
- **Radishes:** super fast growing, easier to plant with kids, easily cut up in the garden to be eaten fresh
- **Salad Turnips:** see radishes
- **Herbs:** both perennial and annual are great in school gardens! Recommended: basil, oregano, parsley, dill, chives, mint, rosemary, sage, thyme.
- **Flowers:** Beautifies the garden, some are edible! We highly recommend sunflowers, nasturtiums, and snapdragons!

### These ones are okay:

- **Beets:** good use of space and neat to look at once picked, but older beets contain a lot of oxalic acid and can cause sore throats when eaten fresh.
- **Beans:** take up a fair amount of space for the yield, but are pickable by kids, we recommend pole beans planted amongst taller plants to maximize space if you do grow them.

- **Full-Sized/Paste Tomatoes:** cherry tomatoes are more kid-friendly.
- **Lettuce mix/Salad mix/Braising mix:** can be a good way to engage kids in these types of veggies, but the weeding is intensive.
- **Swiss Chard:** can't be eaten fresh by everyone due to oxalic acid on the leaf, which can give kids sore throats, takes up a lot of space.
- **Pumpkins/Winter Squash:** if you do, we recommend smaller, less vining, bush varieties or creating a space that is specifically a "pumpkin patch" so the plants have room to vine.
- **Sweet/Bell Peppers:** this really could be "not recommended", but they are easily cut into pieces for taste tests, and some years they do pretty well.
- **Hot peppers:** depending on the variety this could be "highly recommended" to "not recommended", stay away from super hot varieties, but jalapenos, anaheims, and poblanos are pretty mild and good for salsas.
- **Onions:** take up a fair amount of space to get many, one harvest, kids don't love them raw, but they can be essential for salsas, etc.
- **Tomatillos:** great yields, interesting to kids, some can be eaten raw and still taste good to some, they do take up a lot of space though
- **Popcorn:** kid-friendly, decent yields, can be used in the classroom during the winter
- **Specialty corn:** There are lots of cool and interesting corn varieties besides sweet corn. These corn are usually dried. The seeds can then be ground into cornmeal, cooked whole, used to make jewelry, etc.
- **Kohlrabi:** kid-friendly, decent use of space, only one harvest, but can be planted early then relay-cropped after harvest.
- **Bok choy/tatsoi:** good cold weather crops, but hate the heat of the summer. Pretty kid-friendly, easily cut up in pieces for eating raw in the garden.
- **Cucamelons:** specialty miniature cucumber, grape-size, very kiddo friendly, but need a relatively long season, but on hot, dry years they do pretty well!
- **Shelling Peas:** not a great fresh veggie, but could be used for season extension seed-saving activities in the late fall/winter. Grows well here.

#### Not Recommended:

- **Broccoli:** takes up too much space and only 1-2 cuttings.
- **Cauliflower:** takes up too much space and only 1 cutting.
- **Cabbage:** takes up too much space and only 1 cutting.
- **Sweet corn:** takes up too much space, low production for the space used.
- **Heirloom Full-Sized Tomatoes:** you'll get more from non-heirloom varieties outdoors in Montana, if you have a greenhouse/hoophouse this would make these more doable.
- **Lettuce:** this can be done early or late especially if you relay crop, only one cutting.
- **Large Pumpkins:** they just take up too much space.
- **Celery:** doesn't grow well in Montana, very long season
- **Melons:** don't grow well in Montana normally, very long season, low yields, vining plant takes up a lot of space
- **Eggplant:** low yields, can't be eaten raw.

- **Parsnips:** need deep soil, hard to harvest, very long season.
- **Potatoes:** one harvest, can't really be eaten raw, not very pretty in the garden, low production for the space used.
- **Mustard greens:** don't do well in the summer heat, too spicy for most kids.
- **Scallions:** better off doing chives.
- **Garlic:** not very kid-friendly, but is the only veggie planted in the fall, needs to be cured and is usually too much for kids when eaten raw.
- **Turnips (all other besides salad):** Not good raw, not really a super kid-friendly veggie.