

Crop Rotation

Vegetable gardens are an excellent way of demonstrating food production. You don't need masses of room as you can plant tomatoes in grow bags, use deep containers for potatoes and carrots, place a trellis on a fence for beans to climb or even grow a pot of cress on the window sill. The fact that pupils can plant, care for and then harvest something to eat is an unforgettable experience.

Growing Vegetables

Vegetables are best grown in raised beds of around 50cm depth, where they are less likely to be trampled or eaten by rabbits, and will be more accessible to the pupils. Raised beds are literally containers above ground level filled with soil. The containers can be constructed out of a variety of materials including bricks, railway sleepers, tractor tyres, barrels or large pots.

When planning your vegetable area, it is a good idea to site it near a water supply and to plant crops that will mature and be harvested before the summer holiday. If not, the pupils may miss the best bit! Try to make use of all the space available by 'stacking' plants of different heights and cropping times together.

The pupils should be involved at all stages with the planning, planting and maintenance of the areas. Plastic spades, rakes and watering cans can all be used when the ground is quite soft. Pupils can help weed beds, water in dry weather, collect and relocate snails off the vegetables and, of course, harvest any fruit or vegetables.

Garden organically, without chemical fertilisers and pesticides. There are many peat-free types of compost for sale and you could start your own compost heap. As for 'pests' – nature has its own pest-controllers. Try encouraging the predators of the 'pest' into your garden.

Growing Fruit

Why not consider an orchard in your school grounds? Norfolk County Council offer schools a 100% grant scheme for fruit trees. Contact your Grounds Advisor for further information. You could celebrate the harvest each year by having a special apple day.

If you would prefer something smaller you could try strawberries in pots. These may need protection from hungry birds - the top half of a 2 litre plastic drinks bottle placed over the plant is a simple method of protection.



Crab Apples

Crop Rotation

Crop rotation is a traditional way of farming to ensure a healthy soil. Usually four crops are grown in different areas, and are rotated each year. At least one of the crops should be leguminous such as clover or peas; these plants have nitrogen-fixing bacteria in their roots and help recover fertility in the soil.

You could have a mini-crop rotation system in your grounds with four raised, equally sized beds, of at least one metre square. There are numerous combinations of effective crop rotations. Explore the online resources in the Contacts section to find a crop rotation that suits your own needs.

Fact

- During the Second World War school playgrounds were dug up so that fruit and vegetables could be grown on the plot of land. Pupils were even given an extra couple of days off from school to help with the harvest!

