MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension



Rooted in Community: Strategies for Supporting School and Community Gardens

MSUE Fall Extension Conference 2026

Today We'll Dig Into..

- Information, Strategies, and resources to support school and community gardens
- Starting a School or Community Garden: Essential Steps for Success D2L course
- In-person adaptations of the D2L course
- Interactive Activity



- Who has experience supporting school or community garden projects?
- What went well?
- Did anything go wrong?

Resources & Learning Opportunities

- Foundations of Gardening
- Smart Gardening with Vegetables 101
- Ask Extension
- Lawn and Garden Hotline
- Gardening in MI Facebook
- Organic Farmer Training Program

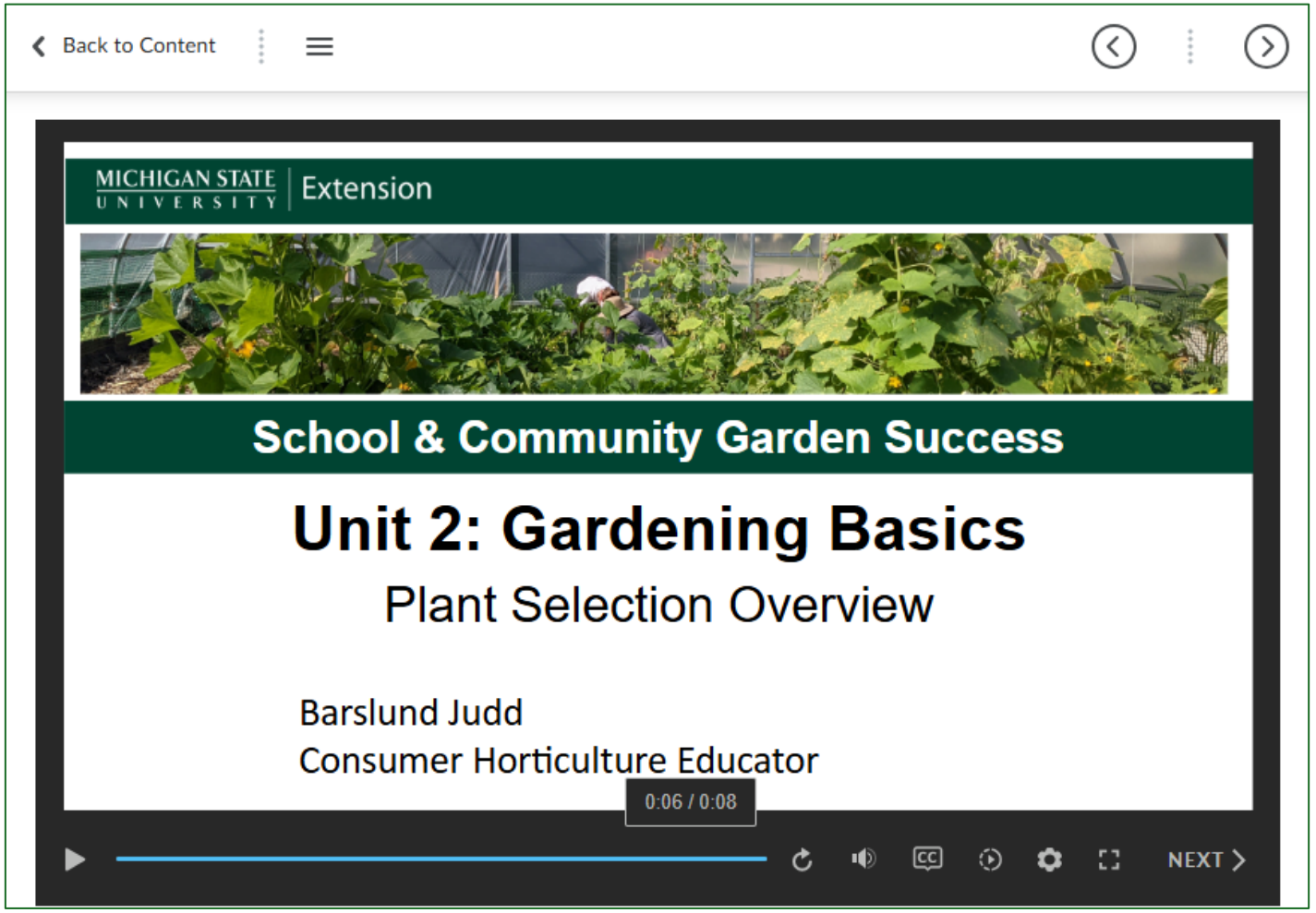
Internal MSUE Training



D2L Course

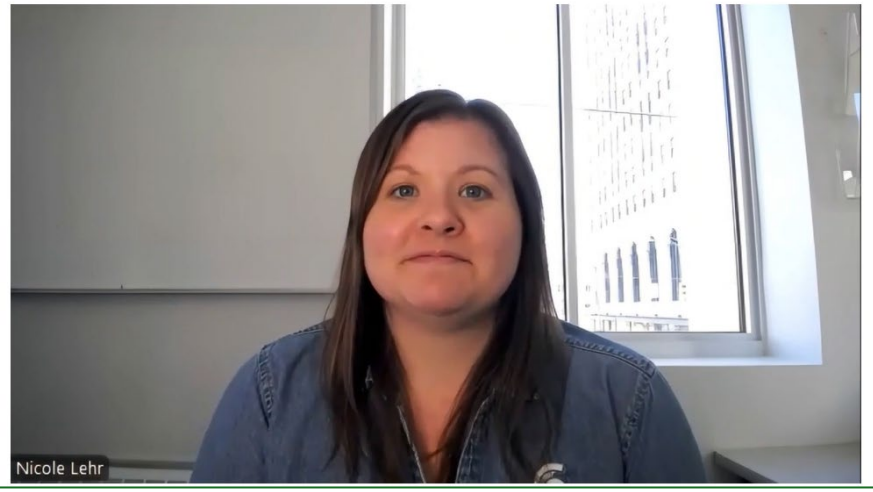


D2L Course



Real Garden Example #2

Watch this video to learn more about how Nicole Lehr has creatively supported a school partner facing challenges in their garden program.



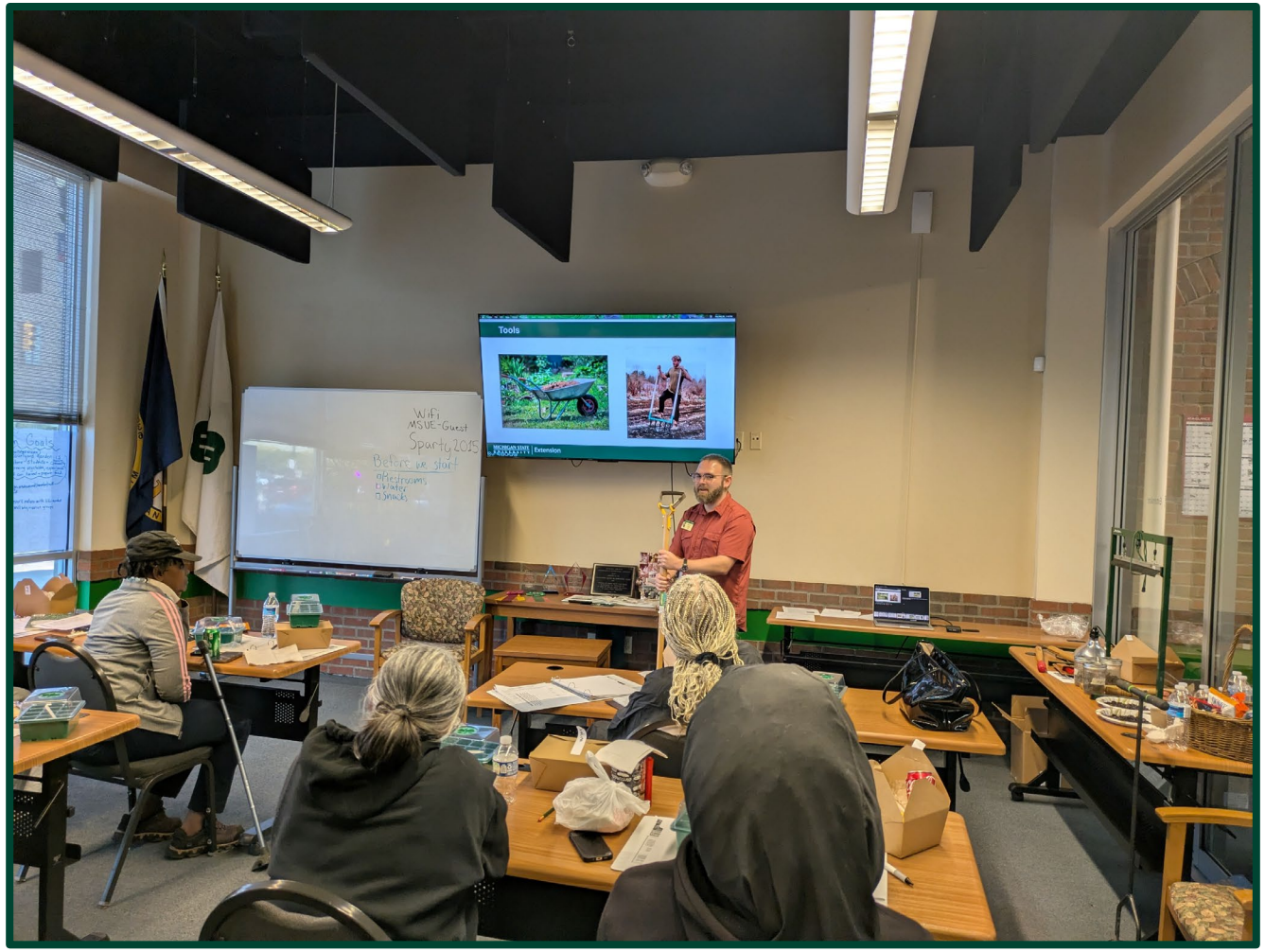
Garden Sustainability and Funding Resources

Grants

- KidsGardening.org School Garden Grants: https://kidsgardening.org/grant-opportunities/
- Other School Garden Grants: https://kidsgardening.org/external-grant-opportunities/
- Community and Public Garden Grants: https://www.publicgardens.org/public-garden-grants/
- USDA Grants: *Note – these are highly competitive and often require a garden project to be part of a larger food system initiative*
  - Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production: https://www.usda.gov/topics/urban/innovative-production
  - Community Food Projects: https://www.nifa.usda.gov/grants/funding-opportunities/community-food-projects-competitive-grants-program
  - Patrick Leahy Farm to School Grant Program: https://www.fns.usda.gov/f2s/grant
- Local Foundations and Philanthropic Organizations – remember to connect the funder's goals to your garden program goals

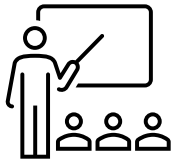
Donations

In-Person Training





Important questions to ask before you start a garden:



- Who wants this garden?
- What is the purpose of the garden?
- Who will support the garden?

Community Need + Garden Benefit = Garden Goal

Education Garden



Food Production Garden



Pollinator Garden



Community Garden





GATHERING CHAMPIONS AND SUPPORT

Potential Champions and Partners

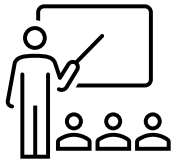
School Gardens:

- Teachers
- Maintenance Staff
- Parent/Teacher Organizations
- Students
- Etc.

Potential Champions and Partners

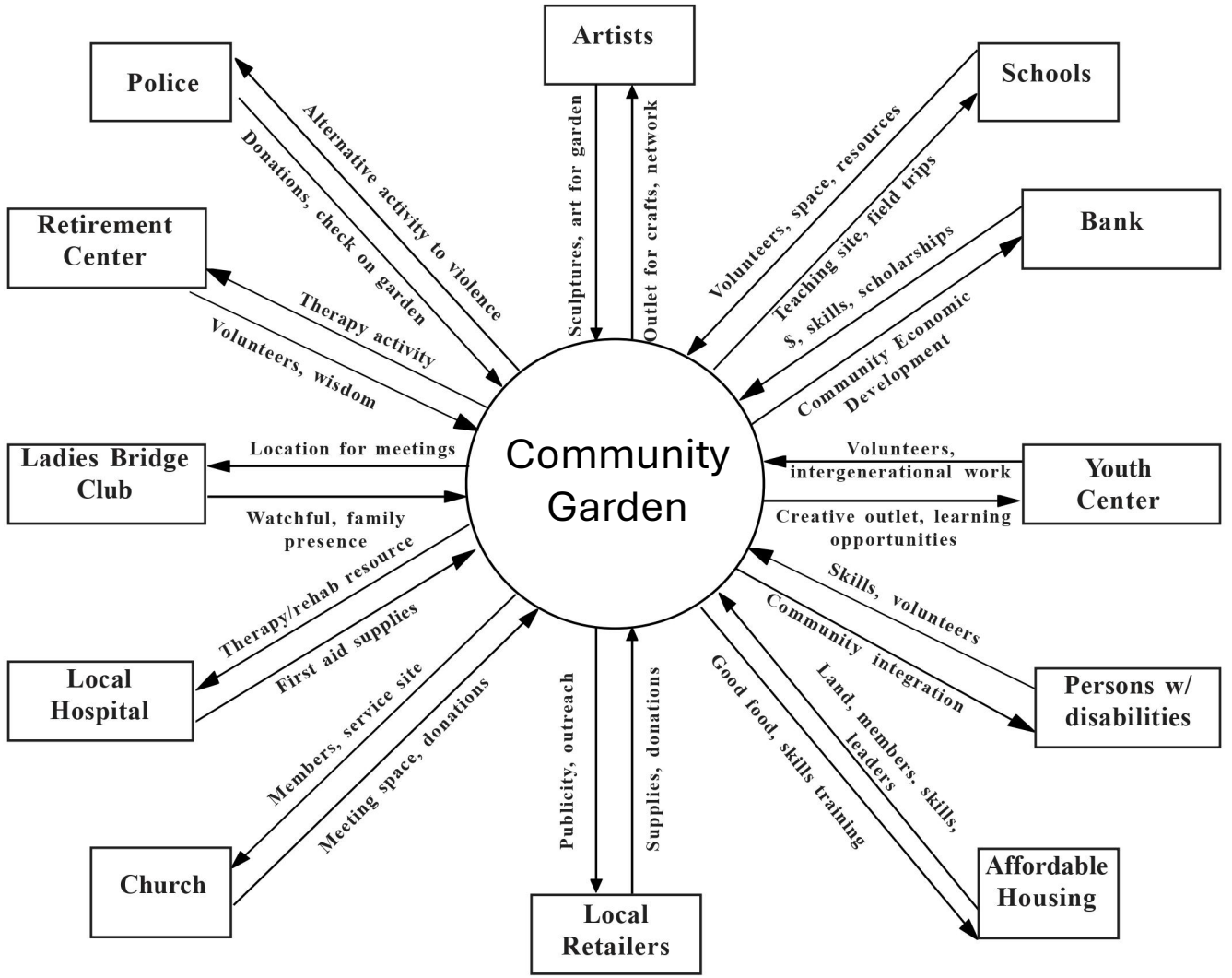
Community Gardens:

- Schools
- Neighborhood Groups
- Places of Worship + Religious Organizations
- City Governments - Parks and Recreation
- Etc.



Can’t Extension Master Gardener volunteers just do it for me?

MAPPING RECIPROCAL PARTNERSHIPS

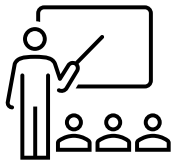


Community Garden Management Toolkit, Springfield Food Policy Council



Garden Site Selection

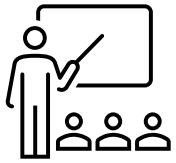
One of the most important assets to consider when starting a garden is WHERE the garden will go. Some things to consider when selecting a site:



- Size and topography of space
- Land ownership status
- Existing infrastructure (garden beds, irrigation, fencing)
- Access to water
- Security/accessibility for volunteers
- Past land use of site
- Soil quality
- Presence of animals (groundhogs, bunnies, deer, birds)



Garden Rules and Guidelines



- Need to have agreed upon Rules and Guidelines for garden space
- Rules should address:
  - Any plants that are not allowed in the garden
  - Types of fertilizers and pesticides that are allowed to be used, and by whom
  - Guidelines for harvesting and distributing food or flowers that are grown
  - Who can volunteer and when
  - Tool care and safety guidelines

- Garden rules and guidelines should be decided before a garden is established.

- Consider laws, ordinances, or rules that might impact your garden.



Community Garden Guidelines Examples

- **Garden plots are allotted annually.** Gardeners at the end of the season have the option to return to their plot by following the spring signup as outlined by your garden.
- **All plots must have signs of being planted by June 1st** unless your garden has set an earlier planting date.
- **Pesticide, chemical fertilizer, and biosolid (organic material recycled from sewage) compost use is prohibited.** Natural fertilizers and pest controls are allowed.

Example from: Boston Community Gardens

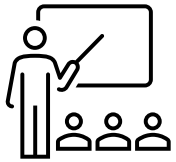


School Garden Guidelines Examples

suggestions

Suggested Garden Rules:

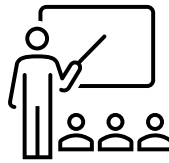
1. Please walk at all times, no running!
2. There are places for people and places for plants, be sure to walk in the people places only.
3. Use your garden voice, no shouting please.
4. Listen for instructions from your teacher or garden instructor.
5. Always ask an adult before picking or harvesting from the garden.
6. Respect all living things in the garden: plants and animals.
7. Handle garden tools carefully.
8. Keep garden tools in front of you at all times, no swinging around!
9. Clean and return garden tools to the place they belong.
10. Keep soil in garden beds.

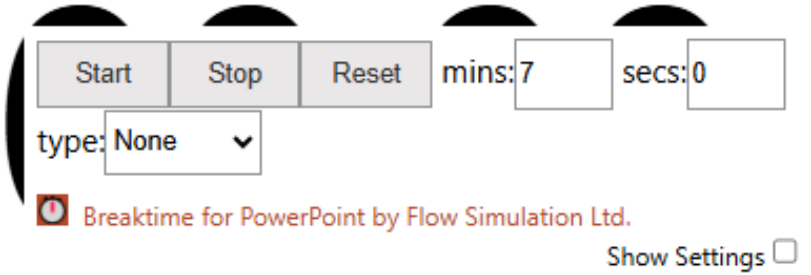


Example from: New York Botanical Gardens

Establishing Garden Guidelines Activity

- Split into groups of 4-6 people
- Consider the garden scenario on your worksheet
- Create garden guidelines that would be supportive of this garden scenario
- Be prepared to share out with the whole group

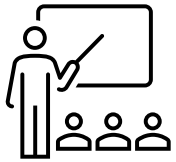






GARDEN SUSTAINABILITY AND FUNDING

Gardens require ongoing time commitment and resources to be most successful.



Ways to ensure ongoing **volunteer** support:

- Partner with community organizations focused on volunteerism
- AmeriCorps programs
- School service hour requirements
- Build garden maintenance into the curriculum for a class or club

No matter what, you will still need consistent leadership, a garden goal, and guidelines!

GARDEN PROGAM SUSTAINABILITY

Document Everything!

- Who has been involved
- What funding has been used and donations received
- Rules/Guidelines
- What worked, what didn't
- What was planted where & when
  - Variety, quality, and yield
- Pest problems and management attempts



Photo: Karyn Juntunen, Copper Shores Community Health Foundation

GARDEN FUNDING OPTIONS

Grants

Donations

Fundraisers

Membership Dues/Fees

Inclusion in Larger Budgets

www.kidsgardening.org/grant-opportunities

Garden Supply Support Pilot Program

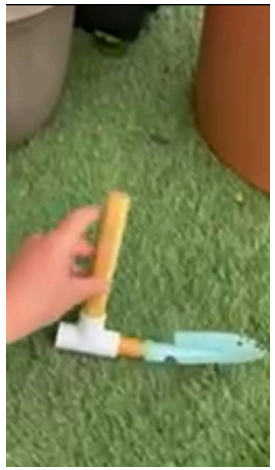


MSU Extension,

Thank you for offering your supply grant to support our summer Rust Park pollinator garden. We appreciate your programs.

Perry Center Early Childhood,

Chandra Patton





How did the supplies received through this program impact your garden project?

2 responses

It has helped tremendously! Each child has been able to be fully hands on, has had fresh veggies at school and to give to their families. Also, learning to give to others by taking to our neighbors.

The supplies provided through this program made a tremendous impact on our garden project. They allowed us to create engaging, hands-on learning experiences that otherwise would have been difficult to provide within our budget. The materials helped us enhance the garden, support children's exploration of nature, and create meaningful opportunities for families to learn and grow together. We are incredibly grateful for the MSU Extension support.

Do you have any other comments about this program?

2 responses

We are so thankful for everything we have received and ALL the education I received with the classes. I absolutely appreciate everything MSU extension has done at every level. Thank you. Sorry for the late submission, I somehow missed the email. 🤦🏻‍♀️ thank you thank you and thank you!

Yes! We supplemented our garden project with free resources from MATP's lending library. One of our favorite items was a voice amplifier headset, which made it much easier for our large group to hear during outside storytime. We would definitely purchase one in the future, which are around $35.

Feel free to share this resource in your future training. Learn more about MATP and its free lending library: https://mi-at.org/lending-library/

The Michigan Assistive Technology Program (MATP) is a service for individuals with disabilities, by individuals with disabilities. MATP provides demonstrations, training, and loans of assistive technology to individuals, families, community organizations, businesses, schools, and other entities. MATP ensures access to technology solutions that enhance independence and improve the quality of life for people with disabilities.

Were there any tools or supplies that you received as part of this program that you thought you were going to use, but did not?

2 responses

Nope! We used them all and oh so thankful for them all.

We have not yet used the approximately 28-inch rake, hoe, and shovel set. Because we primarily work in our raised garden bed and found that small hand tools—or simply using our hands—were more practical for planting and maintaining the garden. We anticipate using the larger tools this fall as we prepare and maintain the garden for the next growing season.

Is there a need for School or Community Gardening Education in your Community?

- 2027 Plans:
  - Offering workshops across the state – based on need
  - Train the Trainer-ish opportunities
- School and Community Garden Working Group?

  All still in the works, but reach out if you're interested

Thank you! Q&A

