Horticulture expert shares resources to incorporate gardening in the classroom

K-State’s Domenghini says donations are important

By Maddy Rohr, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. — Research has shown that school gardens can be used to extend the learning across the curriculum from math and science to language arts, history and more. Kansas State University horticulture expert Cynthia Domenghini says starting the program is often the hardest barrier to overcome.

“Finances play a role in any gardening venture, but for school gardens, this barrier can prevent a program from getting in the ground,” Domenghini said. “Sometimes the costs fall on the educator who is managing the program. There are ways to supplement garden programs to reduce costs, but this requires planning.”

She said now is a great time to start collecting and asking students to bring in recycled containers for starting seeds. Single-serving yogurt containers, pudding cups, lunchable trays and ‘to-go’ containers from restaurants are a few possibilities to use for growing seeds.

Egg cartons are also commonly recommended and can be used, but the ones made of cardboard tend to dry out very quickly and may require watering multiple times each day.

Styrofoam cartons will dry out slower, but because the container size is so small, those will still require daily watering. K-cups are another creative option for small, seed-starting containers.

No matter what container is used, Domenghini said drainage holes will have to be added before adding soil.

Some considerations to make before asking students to bring in containers:

- How many containers do you need? Make this clear so you don’t end up with an excess of materials taking up classroom space.

- Ask students to clean the containers before bringing them in. This will reduce the odor and mess in their backpacks and classroom, and will distribute the work of cleaning between everyone.
• Specify the type/size/material of the containers.

• Specify the end date for bringing in containers, unless you want students to bring them in year-round.

Asking local businesses to partner with your garden program by donating materials is also an option. Domenghini suggests using a donation request letter.

“Some materials to request include seed-starting mix, seeds, hand tools, hoses/watering cans and heat mats for starting seeds,” Domenghini said.

She also recommends building a three-bin compost system to help students discover the benefits of compost.

“Generating the excitement now will help you establish a volunteer base to keep the garden growing year-round,” Domenghini said.

Domenghini and her colleagues in K-State’s Department of Horticulture and Natural Resources produce a weekly Horticulture Newsletter with tips for maintaining home landscapes and gardens. The newsletter is available to view online or can be delivered by email each week.

Interested persons can also send their garden and yard-related questions to Domenghini at cdom@ksu.edu, or contact your local K-State Research and Extension office.

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K-State Research and Extension local offices, https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/statewide-locations.html

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