



---

## M E M O R A N D U M

---

**DATE:** July 2011  
**TO:** Communities and Schools  
**FROM:** BlazeSports America  
**RE:** Accessible Gardens Checklist<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of the Accessible Gardens Checklist (below) is to help communities review and evaluate significant components of technical provisions of building raised bed gardens to ensure accessibility for students with disabilities. The checklist has been compiled and modified to support the CPPW communities to develop a raised bed garden; therefore, the checklists provided present all relevant information to your school about not only the technical accessibility provisions, but also the development of a raised bed garden network at your school.

Importantly, the accessibility checklist is intended for consultative purposes. Schools and communities are encouraged to consult with a landscape architect or a professional gardener if needed. This technical resource is a compilation of guidance from different sources and intended to serve as a comprehensive form for communities to assess the issues and concerns relating to accessibility.

It is important to note that no official standard for accessible gardens exists. However, the comprehensive information provided in the attached checklist is significant and contains a wide range of recommended technical provisions for consideration. The checklist presents the minimum scoping and technical requirements for a proposed raised bed garden. Thus, the technical provisions may help your school to evaluate any barriers and variables stemming from the uniqueness of each area of schoolyard/garden area.

Perhaps most importantly, it is imperative to understand that every raised bed garden project is unique, thus all of the detailed steps and questions in the checklist may not be relevant to each project. Therefore, it is recommended that communities and schools adapt the checklist to your own needs. BlazeSports encourages communities to consult with people with disabilities in your community during the planning and design of gardens.

---

<sup>1</sup>A updated version of guidelines compiled and reviewed by BlazeSports America

*Links to all relevant online references:*

- California School Garden Network, 2010  
<http://www.csgn.org/images/pdf/GFLBook.pdf>
- Dowling Community Garden retrieved from:  
<http://www.dowlingcommunitygarden.org/pages/projects.htm>
- DIY Accessibility: Making An Accessible Garden retrieved from <http://www.diy-accessibility.com/accessible-garden.html>



### Guidelines Checklist for Accessible Bed Gardens

Considerations	Barriers for Use of Accessible Gardens	Recommended Provisions for Accessible Gardens
<input type="checkbox"/> Location	Mobility is a major concern	<input type="checkbox"/> An accessible raised bed should be located closest to the school <input type="checkbox"/> A raised bed shall be considered at least semi- permanent; thus, a patio area, with its flat, smooth surface, can be a good spot to build the bed, allowing easy access from your school to the garden <input type="checkbox"/> The area along the bed frame's edge should be cleared so that wheelchair users, as well as walkers, can easily reach the bed** <b>**Note:</b> One may consider pulling up all the grass for several inches or even several feet out from the best of the bed. In addition, either leaving the ground bare or covering it with a material like finely crushed rock or pea stones shall be recommended
<input type="checkbox"/> Select raised bed type/styles		<input type="checkbox"/> <b>A-Frame Planter Stand:</b> the A-frame planter stand is a wonderful design for either an adult or a child with a physical disability** <b>**Note:</b> If you'll be sitting while gardening, the frame can be built low enough to allow a few inches' clearance over the knees so a wheelchair or other seat can be brought right up to the planting box <input type="checkbox"/> <b>A Garden on Shelves:</b> a shelf garden is inexpensive and easy to put together, to rearrange, and to disassemble; a smaller version might be just right for putting a child's container garden within an accessible reach <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Pole-and-Post Gardens:</b> known as a no-bend kind of gardening, these kind of special arrangements of plants are meant to be built at eye or waist level, both for looks and for ease in care

<input type="checkbox"/> Height	Height for wheelchair users is too high or too low	<input type="checkbox"/> 6"-12" high may suit for many gardeners including wheelchair users** <b>**Note:</b> A raised bed garden, at 6"-12" high, shall not be the absolute solution for every gardener with a physical disability <input type="checkbox"/> A height of 18-30" may be required to accommodate all gardeners including people with disabilities
<input type="checkbox"/> Length or Depth	Length for wheelchair users is too high or too low	<input type="checkbox"/> A maximum length of 10" for a raised bed is recommended <input type="checkbox"/> At least a 3-foot area for clearance around the beds is recommended <input type="checkbox"/> At least a 5-foot area is required for turning space for two more beds <b>**Note:</b> The final measurement – depth – is determined by the raised bed's height
<input type="checkbox"/> Accessibility/Soil	Some raised beds may have very limited accessible features because they only raise the garden a few inches to a foot off the ground  Soil may be out of reach from a seated or non-bending standing position	<input type="checkbox"/> The soil may have tapered sides to make the garden as accessible as possible while still maintaining the soil depth required for all types of growing (about 12") <input type="checkbox"/> May require careful engineering and rugged construction <input type="checkbox"/> Soil may be excavated 2" below ground level where pathway paving is to be installed and leveled
<input type="checkbox"/> Garden construction features	May have inadequate materials  A soft and irregular surface such as crushed rock, cobblestone, flagstone, and river rock may prevent persons with a mobility problem from navigating  Concrete, brick, and asphalt are expensive	<input type="checkbox"/> May need recycled composite decking (12' x 6" x 1"), 12 boards per bed <input type="checkbox"/> Some unique materials such as geoblock may be a great recycled plastic material for wheelchair paving <input type="checkbox"/> Packed soil is inexpensive for path <input type="checkbox"/> Screenings, of ¼ size to dust, is a good and inexpensive material, as is decomposed granite of the same size
<input type="checkbox"/> Raised bed construction materials		<input type="checkbox"/> 24' slotted angle irons, 4 per bed, are recommended <input type="checkbox"/> 2.5' metal corner braces are recommended <input type="checkbox"/> 36" u-posts, 8 per bed, may be used <input type="checkbox"/> 14 gauge galvanized wires may be used

		<input type="checkbox"/> Galvanized deck screws may be used
<input type="checkbox"/> Mobility: Paths and Ramps (Ground surface)	<p>Mobility may be extremely challenging</p> <p>The pathway may be too long or too short</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> The width of the ramp or path may vary depending on the user, so the services of a contractor or landscape architect may be recommended <input type="checkbox"/> The width of three feet may be considered a minimum for one-way traffic involving a wheelchair or walker, or for transporting a wheelbarrow <input type="checkbox"/> A four-foot width shall allow a wheelchair user to make a 90-degree turn without reversing <input type="checkbox"/> A five-foot width shall allow a wheelchair user to make a complete 180-degree turn <input type="checkbox"/> Laying out the walkway in a curved design rather than with sharp angles shall make it easier to use <input type="checkbox"/> Having edge guides shall protect wheelchairs, crutches, and canes from going off the side of the path
<input type="checkbox"/> Tools/Weeds	<p>Standard garden tools are too short, too long or too heavy</p> <p>Weeds may prevent the wheelchair user from navigating along the edge</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> May consider light weight tools with large handles for better grip, particularly if students with disabilities have limited strength; wheelchair users shall find long-handled tools more convenient to use
<input type="checkbox"/> Slope	<p>Slopes may be demanding for the wheelchair user</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> The gradient should be 1:20 or less; i.e., for every 20' of walkway, the path arises no more than 1'. <input type="checkbox"/> The gradient of 5% may need to be consulted with a landscape architect specialized in accessibility design because it may still be too steep for some wheelchair users <input type="checkbox"/> The grade of slope may be no more than 3% (1:33.33); in this way, most wheelchair users shall have no obstacle(s) negotiating <input type="checkbox"/> If dealing with very steep slopes, the services of a contractor or landscape architect shall be required

SOURCE: \*Adapted from Accessible Gardening for People with Physical Disabilities: A Guide to Methods, Tools, and Plants / California School Garden Network: Creating and Sustaining Your School Garden \*\*Conditional Exceptions: Apply on a case-by-case; where full applicability is not possible because of the limitations and constraints included in the conditional exceptions; and, maximum extent feasible.



## Guidelines Checklist for Raised Bed Garden Planning

Action Steps	Details of Creating and Maintaining a School Garden
Step 1	<p><b>Seeking Administrative Approval</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Gain the support of your school's administrators.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Develop an outline of your vision.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Include the ways you think the garden will benefit your students and the community.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Convince your school's administrators of your ideas for how you can incorporate the garden into the standards-based curriculum as a hands-on interdisciplinary teaching tool.</li> </ul>
Step 2	<p><b>Creating a support network</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Enlist other teachers, school staff, students, parents, and community volunteers to serve on a garden planning and advisory team.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Begin building your network by conducting a brainstorming session with potential supporters.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Spread the word by presenting the project idea at a faculty, school board, or PTO meeting and inviting people to join the brainstorming session.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Notify other community members of the upcoming session by hanging posters, sending out a newsletter, or placing announcement through local newspapers, radio, or television.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Create a group of people who will work well together and invest the time, energy, and patience to accomplish their goals</li> </ul>
Step 3	<p><b>Identifying goals and linking the garden to your curriculum</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ensure that your goal must tie in with your current curriculum – the garden is a tool to help you accomplish your learning</li> </ul>

	<p>objectives, not an added task for your workload.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Begin your team's goal-setting meeting by sharing information about required academic standards, then brainstorm ways to accomplish these learning objectives through garden lessons.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Engage students, teachers, and community members by informing them about your plans to develop a school raised bed garden and educating them about its benefits.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Create a summary document and distribute it to all participants.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Share your plans with other teachers, administrators, and community members.</li> </ul>
Step 4	<p><b>Designing the garden</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Bring together committed partners and stakeholders in the form of a working group to facilitate garden development and design.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ensure that the garden design should be practical, functional, accessible, and fun.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Involve your students and garden team in the process.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Identify available resources that will help facilitate raised bed garden development and universal design.</li> </ul>
Step 5	<p><b>Identifying supply needs and funding needs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Make a list of materials and supplies needed before you begin searching for financial support and donations.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Estimate the costs for the entire project and prepare a realistic budget.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Include expenses for the site development and improvement, operation, curriculum, and miscellaneous items.</li> </ul>
Step 6	<p><b>Obtaining supplies and funds</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Think of your funding search as an opportunity to provide additional community members a chance to participate in an extraordinary and powerful youth program.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Do not search for funds until you complete the preliminary planning and design steps.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Determine whether or not your school or school district has internal supply funds to help with your program.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Look for additional local resources within your community.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Expand your search to regional, state, and national opportunities.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Use a combination of three strategies – donations, grants, and fundraising projects – to secure the funds needed to begin and maintain your garden program.</li> </ul>
Step 7	<p><b>Planting the garden</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Measure and stake each planting area (use a string from stake to stake to better delineate the garden bed), then loosen the existing soil with a spading fork and add soil, compost, or both until the bed is 8 to 12 inches high.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Rake the surface smooth to create a flat-topped bed, which increases water retention and decreases soil erosion.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Create raised bed frames using rot-resistant wood, such as cedar or redwood, or other materials, such as recycled plastic boards, bricks, rocks, or cement blocks in order to create permanent, well-defined raised beds.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Consider installing landscaping fabric to suppress weeds from growing up in your bed and/or gopher wire as a barrier when installing framed raised beds.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Avoid pressure-treated lumber as it has been treated with toxic chemicals; instead, fill beds with soil or a mixture of soil and compost.</li> </ul>
Step 8	<p><b>Maintaining the garden</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Need to maintain the garden through regular activities such as watering, thinning, weeding, fertilizing, mulching, composting, and monitoring.</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Watering</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Do not automatically assume that you need to water wilted plants, because they may also wilt when there is ample or excessive water.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Apply the spray to the base of the plant and avoid excessive moisture on the leaves.</li> </ul>

	<p><b><i>Thinning</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Instruct your students to identify the healthiest seedlings and remove the others</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Cut the tops off the unwanted seedlings, after which the roots will eventually decompose.</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Weeding</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Should remove all weeds because they will compete for space, light, and water with your intended crops.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ensure that weeding does not become an overwhelming job, encourage students to monitor the garden continuously and remove weeds when they are small.</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Mulching</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Use a number of different materials as much, including shredded wood, leaves, and straw.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Choose mulch according to your plant's needs, mulch availability, and visual preferences.</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Fertilizing</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Check with school administrators to see if there are any restrictions on the type fertilizer your class may use in the garden.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ensure that you need to constantly monitor nutrient levels and provide additional fertilizers.</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Composting</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Check the California School Garden Network (CSGN) website at <a href="http://www.csgn.org">www.csgn.org</a> for more information on creating a compost pile or contact your local Cooperative Extension Service office.</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Harvesting</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Consult with a professional gardener for ideas on ways to harvest root crops if needed.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Check different sources of harvesting a variety of vegetables and crops.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Create a plan for harvesting and distributing products.</li> </ul>
Step 9	<p><b>Sustaining the garden</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Match lessons and activities with your curricular goals, adopt good outdoor classroom</li> </ul>

management techniques, create measurements for success, and document all your efforts.

- Maintain the approval of your administrators.
- Attract additional garden team members and volunteers.
- Find new sources of financial and material support.
- Review a list of goals for the garden and develop a method to determine whether your efforts are meeting them.
- Consult with expert school district personnel and local researchers for ideas on ways to measure the benefits of the school garden.
- Continue to inspire excitement in your students, their parents, other teachers, administrators, volunteers, and the community.

**SOURCE:** \*Adapted from California School Garden Network (2010). *Creating and Sustaining Your School Garden*.

