

Where We Learn Matters... Add a Little Nature!

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Over time, a recognizable pattern has developed in youth that has begun to alter their behavior, health and consciousness. Today, American children are spending more time indoors and less time engaging with nature compared to recent history. In author Richard Louv's book, "Last Child in the Woods," he presents a persuasive case for the importance of nature to a child's physical and emotional well-being, while also describing youth's disconnect today as a 'nature-deficit disorder.' Though not a disorder in the traditional sense, there are very real, measureable affects to be noted. Recently, more and more research has been conducted to connect various childhood and adolescent issues, such as ADHD and obesity, to their sedentary lifestyles. The cure for this is very simple and part of GEF's mission: reintroducing our youth to nature, especially at school.

Schools, even in urban areas, provide a special opportunity for teachers and community leaders to shape their classroom curriculum, student clubs and sustainability initiatives around nature through the use of gardens and green spaces. GEF's free [Green Thumb Challenge](#) program provides the gardening resources, educational tools and more to help introduce and integrate nature in the classroom. Gardens can be an intimidating project, so start small! A valuable learning tool can be grown in a 4x4 raised bed, on an indoor windowsill or in a small container. GEF has building and planting instructions, tips for testing soil, how to choose a location, and more in the [Green Thumb Challenge Start Up Kit](#).

Past surveys conducted have shown that educators find gardening to be a great way to teach collaboration amongst their students, as well as fostering a sense of commitment and responsibility. Furthermore, gardens and nature can be incorporated in lessons for all different [classroom subjects](#) and grade levels, including science, health, math, language arts, and creativity. There are numerous ways a garden can become a valuable [teaching tool](#), and the Green Thumb Challenge offers plenty of grade specific [lesson plans](#) and [activities](#) all about gardens and nature that you can take advantage of today.

For those schools with an existing garden, GEF has teamed up with Gardener's Supply Company to offer a [\\$5,000 grant](#) to an exceptional youth garden project that has a positive impact on the school and community. Get gardening now and share your work with GEF by September 30 to be entered to win the grant! Don't forget that the [Green Apple Day of Service](#) takes place on September 29, so it's perfect timing to host an event and wrap up your summer gardening project! The spaces where children learn matter in so many ways, and their power to provide kids a unique place to reconnect with nature should never be overlooked. Get gardening today!

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