




(RE)CONNECTING CHILDREN WITH NATURE

School gardens: growing the roots of tomorrow





« Providing every school with a simple, concrete way of reconnecting children to nature through the use of school gardens. »

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1/3 1 in 3 schoolchildren cannot identify common foods such as leeks, zucchinis, figs or artichokes from a picture

« A 20-minute exposure to nature is sufficient to lower cortisol levels, the hormone associated with stress*. »

Study carried out in 2019 and published in *Frontiers in Psychology*.

A GENERATION INCREASINGLY DISCONNECTED FROM NATURE

Nowadays, one in two children almost never play outside. With towns springing up everywhere, the declining availability of urban green spaces, and the pervasive presence of digital screens, opportunities for contact with nature are diminishing rapidly.

At the same time, research from the past decades suggests that contact with nature, especially for children, is essential for learning and maintaining an ability to marvel at life. By becoming increasingly disconnected from the living natural world, children are deprived of an important experience that contributes to their overall development and well-being

Providing opportunities for children to experience nature is essential!

- ➔ **Improve their well-being:** Regular contact with nature helps children to refocus, relax and experience the joy of living.
- ➔ **Stimulate their curiosity and their learning needs:** Through gardening, observing and experimenting, children wonder, learn and develop their personal understanding of how life cycles work.
- ➔ **Nurture their eco-friendly behaviour:** by watching seeds grow and nature develop, by becoming aware of the biodiversity that surrounds them, children develop a strong attachment to nature and an interest to learn how to protect the living world.

Building on this evidence, WWF France launched in 2019 the **École jardinière** program, based on a simple idea: **introduce elements of nature into schools through the creation of vegetable gardens on school grounds.** The idea is to create local, hands-on, meaningful projects, focusing on young children, and exposing them to nature in its various forms.

The programs are built on a robust, evidence-based framework, combining experimentation, learning, and emotional engagement to help children connect and reconnect with nature.

With support from the French Development Agency (AFD), the program was initially implemented in **19 pilot schools** before being scaled up to reach **2 500 teachers and 12 public authorities** all over France.

The program provided teachers with practical tools and exercises to support the integration of school garden activities into everyday school life. A study commissioned by WWF found that teachers using the program *Ecole Jardinière* spend on average 6 additional sessions or **12-18 extra hours** in the garden per year. Within just a few years, **École jardinière** has become a powerful movement, helping children reconnect with the natural world by inspiring teachers and transforming school environments.



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« Investment in school gardens generates positive returns for public finances! »

NATURE: A PROVEN AND RELIABLE PARTNER IN CHILDREN'S HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT



The study sample consisted of

- 89** schools
- 184** teachers
- 3500** pupils

For the first time, a large-scale rigorous study was designed to assess the impacts of school gardens on children, providing a significant contribution to the scientific literature on environmental education. It was conducted by Eval-Lab in collaboration with researchers from the Universities of Montpellier, Toulouse, and Bordeaux, as well as the CNRS and IDEE.

The study evaluated the impact of the program *École jardinière* on children's connection to nature, well-being, learning, and cooperation with peers. The study results are compelling: school gardens have a positive impact on children's connection to nature and pro-environmental behaviours. In other words, investing in school gardens generates positive returns for public finances!.

« Since we had our vegetable garden, the children have changed. They speak differently to each other, they help each other, and they observe much more. They marvel at the simplest things. » — Élodie, a teacher in Marseille.

THE RESULTS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES

CONNECTING TO NATURE



+ improvement in emotional well-being



- reduced screen time and anxiety



+ more pro-environmental behaviours

The additional time spent in school gardens results in **increased children's awareness of nature and of the environment in general et la connexion à la nature.**



+ impacts are larger for children in underprivileged school areas and urban areas

A COST-EFFECTIVE INVESTMENT



1€ invested in school gardens generates a profit of 3.35€ to the community

COST OF AN ABOVE-GROUND SCHOOL GARDEN

It costs only **4 000€** to install an above-ground vegetable garden

« We can sow
the seeds
of a better
future ! »



ANIE OGLLOZA / ÉCOLE DOCTEUR ROUX / IRFIMS

TOGETHER , WE CAN SOW THE SEEDS OF A BETTER FUTURE

Work with us

Communities, schools, local partners: you all have a role to play in the expansion of school gardens. By promoting, supporting, facilitating or contributing to the creation of school gardens in your area, you are enabling children to experiment, observe, and learn from nature, and ultimately reconnect with nature.

11 PILOT COMMUNITIES

Paris 20e, Lyon, Grenoble, Quimper, Avignon, Rouen, Grigny, La Ciotat, Lunel, Le Havre, Marseille...

These places have committed to developing educational vegetable gardens, and to sharing their experiences to strengthen children's connection to nature.



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Our priorities

FULLY INTEGRATE education in and to nature in all education policies;

INCREASE vegetation in schools and strengthen its educational impact;

EXPAND the use of educational school gardens and promote weekly outdoor classes to experience nature;

PROVIDE all children with regular opportunities to experience nature outside school, through nature outings and field trips;

SUPPORT local environmental groups.



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« An educational garden does not just mean planting vegetables, it means developing a living project. For it to thrive and benefit everyone, close cooperation between schools and authorities is essential. It also requires the involvement and training of municipal staff, continuity between school time and out-of-school time, and the support of local stakeholders »

— Marjolaine, Education Manager
at WWF-France

**You too can join the movement!
Sign the manifest:
« a municipal term dedicated to an
education system connected to nature »**

➔ + infos on <https://www.wwf.fr/education-nature>

