

YOUTH GARDENING

2024 HANDBOOK



The Gardeners of America

Find this Handbook and other Youth Gardening resources at
[gardenersofamerica.club](https://www.gardenersofamerica.club)

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INTRODUCTION

The youth of today are the adults of tomorrow, so if we want a future where gardening is important, where flowers and vegetables are important to our well-being, where the environment is cared for, then we must interest our young people in the joy of gardening. The future of our Clubs is in the gardening hands and green thumbs of today's children. Therefore, every affiliated club should have a Youth Gardening Committee with a chairman. This committee sets up the Youth Gardening Program and works throughout the year on various activities in Youth Gardening.

PURPOSE

To encourage youth, from birth through age 17, to become interested in gardening, to learn the joy and benefits of working with the soil, and to make them aware of the environment and its requirements for a better and cleaner America.

OBJECTIVES

1. To develop a positive attitude about gardening in our young people.
2. To assist young people to develop new gardening skills.
3. To build confidence and good work habits through gardening.
4. To motivate an awareness of environmental problems and establish programs involving youth in cleaning-up projects, beautification projects with lawns and flowers, and maintenance activities of public areas, communities and homes.
5. To develop good citizenship and socially desirable behavior in schools, public places and homes.

ORGANIZATION OF YOUR YOUTH GARDENING PROGRAM

TGOA CLUBS vary in size, members' ages and locality. Some clubs are very large and have younger members that can put together a big project with many interested, adult helpers. Other clubs have older members who do not have the health for large youth projects. Many members-at-large would still like to be involved in some way by sharing their knowledge and helping the youth. Each club is encouraged to engage youths in productive, meaningful and encouraging ways. The entire club does not have to be involved. If a member or two would like to mentor a child through an activity or a project, that's great! Any child can participate in the youth programs as long as they are sponsored or mentored by a TGOA member.



So, where do you find the youth?

- your children and grandchildren
- relatives and neighbors
- children of your friends and workmates
- schools, after school care groups, daycare centers, preschools
- libraries, church youth groups, inner city groups
- 4-H, YMCA, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, Big Brothers-Big Sisters

Some clubs team up with 4-H, Scouts and schools to do joint projects and activities.

Your club will have to decide what type of **gardening program** to propose. Home gardens? A beautification garden at a hospital, school or community building? Individual plots at a community garden?

Look at your **available manpower** and how many youth you can work with comfortably, then figure out what projects you will encourage. Will they grow vegetables and flowers for exhibitions and fairs? Will they enter special horticultural shows? (Appendix B includes pointers for showing.) What about contests in your community or club, such as Big Tomato?

Decide if there will be **membership requirements** for Youth Gardeners.

If it is felt that a small **fee** must be charged to the participants, take care that no youth is kept from gardening because of financial hardship. Most clubs can handle the expenses of the Youth Gardening program. Sometimes, community-minded groups will help with funding.

Many seed suppliers will provide seeds free for youth gardening. Dealers often are happy to provide the club with packets of **seeds** that have been left over at the end of the year. Use only seeds that have an acceptable second-year germination. Consider the age of the youth when obtaining seeds. A very young child will not want seeds that take a long time to germinate or take a lot of care. Older students are more willing to learn some of the finer points of gardening and can even act as mentors for the younger children.

It is important to get **permission from parents** or guardians for the youth gardener to participate in the program. Use a form that includes the youth's name, address, phone, age, birth date and the parents' names. Make sure there is a place to include any allergies or handicaps the child might have. Who to reach and how in case of an emergency is also important. Appendix A has a form you can download or copy and give to parents and youth gardeners.

Important!

A **background check** is required for anyone and everyone working with children. The TGOA policy relating to club responsibility for persons working in youth programs is:

Individual clubs affiliated with TGOA will require members that are working with youth, in programs sponsored by our organization, to submit to a background check for registered sex offenders. The background checks must be done with your local sheriff's department.

The insurance consultant for TGOA recommends “each local club should have **liability** coverage for premises owned, leased, or used and any activities during the year such as monthly meetings, selling flowers, flower displays or exhibits, volunteer work at different community properties or projects, hosting conventions or meetings for the national association and any other activities a local club could be involved in.” It is worthwhile to check with the community officials concerning liability for community gardening activities.

Activities and Ideas



1. Hold planning meetings with the youth. Discuss planning the garden, preparing the garden, soil preparation, fertilizing and lime. Planting the garden. Care of the garden. Harvesting. Distribute seeds, bulbs, corms and/or plants.
2. Pair a garden member up with a youth gardener. The club member should visit the gardens of the youth at the beginning of the season, occasionally during the season and near harvest. Take pictures of the progress. They should be available for questions and encouragement.
3. Early in the year, take a trip to a gardening center.
4. Invite parents to come with the youth gardener to an educational session with gardening films or slides or have interesting hands- on speakers. Follow the presentation with a question and answer period and include refreshments. (This is also a good way to increase your club membership by getting parents involved.)
5. If community gardens or beautification projects are involved, garden club members should be responsible for overseeing the project. Liability should be considered in these instances.
6. A summer picnic or a fall hot dog roast provided by the club for the youth gardeners and their parents is a nice activity and yet another way to get parents involved and interested in becoming a new member of your club.
7. Have a club flower and vegetable exhibition for your members and the youth gardeners to participate in and enjoy.
8. Hold a garden and plant auction for your club members, guests, parents and youth gardeners. Anything related to gardens can be contributed.
9. Give out a report form for the youth gardeners to list their results on such things as: seed germination, plant growth, the amount of harvest and whatever else you would like to add. Then end the growing season with a culminating activity sharing pictures and stories of their successes and failures. Let them report on their results they have been charting and give awards and certificates to the youth gardeners. This would be another chance to invite the parents too.

10. In the very early spring, study trees and why they are so important to the environment. Have youth gardeners plant a tree on Arbor Day.

Some clubs are large enough to divide the youth gardeners into groups such as:

Tender Sprouts 0 – 5 Saplings 6 – 11 Green Thumbs 12 – 17

HOW NATIONAL CAN HELP YOU



National offers annual Youth Gardening contests in five categories: Pumpkin/Squash, Sunflower, Favorite Flowers, Perfect Plants, Container and Meet My Terrific Tree. Details and directions are on the Kid Gardening page on the website at gardenersofamerica.club.

The youth gardening page on the TGOA website has more ideas and projects for you. The more you share what you are doing with youth gardeners the more the web site will grow. Send your information to National Youth Gardening Chair Cheri Kessen at goafortwayne@gmail.com

Don't be afraid to surf the web for tons of helpful information available.

APPENDIX A

NOTES TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS OF YOUTHGARDENERS



If you have a child who is interested in having a garden or being involved in a gardening activity here are some things for you to remember:

1. Keep this the youth's project, let him/her do the work. You be the adviser.
2. Show interest in the child's garden or project and give encouragement.
3. Take photographs.
4. Help the child keep a journal; younger gardeners might draw pictures of their garden or project in a notebook.
5. If the child will have a personal garden in your yard or at a community garden, go over the garden plans, design and development, making sure it is age appropriate.
6. When supplies, seeds and plants are ready, watch at least part of the planting. Do not do the planting for the child.

7. Continue your interest during the remainder of the garden season. Remember, youth need encouragement, reminders and constructive criticism to succeed.
8. Keep interest in gardening by occasionally mentioning the fun of watching things grow.
9. Praise the products of the garden, whether they are flowers or garden vegetables. Use some for the table, but save the best for horticulture shows and exhibits.
10. Attend the meetings at which your child's efforts are evaluated and he/she receives recognition for the completed garden project. Youth need to have their successes recognized.
11. After the garden is finished and harvested, keep the interest and excitement going by growing a houseplant, herbs or vegetables in a hanging basket or containers positioned indoors under lights or on a windowsill.
12. Take you child on a nature hike, a tree or bird walk, to a zoo, to a butterfly garden, visit a conservatory, botanical garden, arboretum and/or aviary. These make fun family outings and enhance a child's appreciation of nature and our world.

LABELING VARIETIES IS IMPORTANT

When you have seeds, plants and/or bulbs ready to plant, they must be labeled by variety. It is of utmost importance that these names be written on labels for garden use and also written in a journal or paper that is carefully filed away for future use. If the label in the garden is lost or misplaced, the saved copy will specify the exact variety. Labeling helps in making exhibits, and it provides the grower and the public information about that variety. It is important to name your exhibits for a show.

GARDEN CARE REMINDERS

1. Cultivating, mulching and weeding go hand in hand in making a successful garden.
2. For succession crops in your garden watch the planting dates on your seed envelopes. Thin the crops.
3. During dry weather soak your garden, don't just sprinkle.
4. Do not over water plants in containers or pots. Cultivate or loosen soil surface, cut back some stems, disbud when required and pick off dead flowers whenever possible.

HORTICULTURE SHOWS

The showing or displaying of vegetables and flowers produced by the youth gardener is a fitting culmination to a garden program. It gives the youth gardener the opportunity to experience the satisfaction that comes with success. It presents a situation for the development of leadership in organizing and managing an exhibit. It is rewarding, as ribbons and awards are given by accredited judges for exhibits and special prizes are provided to the best exhibits.

The exhibit should be named with the Genus, species and variety or cultivar. A common name may be given also. The name is most-often needed for a top award to be awarded. The schedule will give the number of plant material needed for an exhibit. When you need more than one, it is important to remember uniformity (same in size, shape, color, etc.).

VEGETABLES

Vegetables should be harvested at the proper time to get the best flavor and most food value. Root crops such as beets, carrots and radishes, if harvested too soon, will not have developed their full nutritional value and if allowed to get too old will be tough and of poor value. To get the best taste, vegetables should be used soon after harvesting. Tomatoes should be allowed to develop a full red color on the vine.

Much nutritional value of vegetables may be lost in handling and preparing them. The following instructions should help:

1. Do not crush or bruise vegetables. Keep cold until ready to prepare them.
2. Trim off leaves of crops, such as beets, carrots and kohlrabi when harvesting to prevent shriveling. Peel only when necessary.
3. Vegetables, to be peeled or chopped raw, should be prepared just before using.
4. Cook all vegetables quickly in as little water as possible and only until the vegetable is nearly tender. Steaming is best.
5. To save vitamins when cooking vegetables, do not add soda or too much salt or stir more than necessary.
6. Some vitamins and minerals dissolve in cooking water. Save and serve with vegetables or use in soups or gravies.

FLOWERS

Flowers are attractive in the garden, but they also are useful to cut and use for indoor decoration. To get the most bloom for outdoor use, prune the plants by pinching out the tops (tips) when the plants are 5" to 6" high. Flowers such as marigolds and zinnias will have longer stems and larger blooms if they are disbudded. When the flower buds begin to develop, pinch out all side buds on the stem, leaving one flower to develop. Disbudded stems will be easier to arrange and will produce better specimens for exhibiting at fairs and shows.

Tips to lengthen the lifetime of flowers:

1. Use a sharp knife to cut flowers, as this tool is less likely to bruise or crush the stem. Early morning or late evening is the best time to cut.
2. After flowers are brought in from the garden, cut the stem ends again, under water if possible, and on a definite slant. This will permit greater water absorption. Do this each day to prevent plugging of stem water tubes.

3. Place cut flowers in warm water after cutting from garden plant. Keep in a cool place several hours before arranging or for show.
4. It is important to remove faded blooms from the plants in the garden. If the plant is permitted to go to seed, flower production tends to stop.

APPENDIX B



Tips for Showing at Flower Shows



VEGETABLES, FLOWERS, and FRUITS can be exhibited at fairs and horticulture shows. The Vegetable Sections are always very popular with spectators, especially at harvest time. **Remember to provide name of plant material on your show label.**

Vegetables and Fruits

When vegetables and fruits are exhibited, they are shown in **their prime**, and **when they are best for eating**.

Beans – all the same variety, uniform in maturity, diameter and good color, same length and curve of bean pod. Best quality and flavor is just before swelling of the seeds is noticeable. The pod stem should be attached.

Beets – trim leaf tops to 1½ to 2 inches, uniform in color and size, trim tap root to 2 inches, no secondary roots, no blemishes, all the same variety.

Broccoli – full head, not less than 3 inches in diameter, tight head, buds uniform in size with no color showing. Stems should solid and cut 5 inches from top of head. No insect damage.

Brussels Sprouts – trim neatly with ¼ inch stem, uniform, not less than 1 inch in diameter, green, with no loose leaves. Desirable size is 1½ to 2 inches in diameter.

Cabbage – solid heads, cut stem square ½ inch from taproot, remove course outer leaves, **but do not peel excessively to remove green color (or red)** unless it is Savoy type. No insect damage.

Cantaloupe/Muskmelon – pick when ripe as indicated by a slightly sunken stem scar, and stem pulls easily from fruits. Fruit should be round, good size and color for the variety. It should be firm, with no visible soft spots.

Carrots – trim leaves to 1½ inch and tap root to 1 inch. Should be uniform in size, shape, color, same length, no secondary roots, not bleached, no green at shoulders, should be brittle.

Cauliflower – head at least 4 inches in diameter, leaves removed except to protect head. The head should be smooth, dense, uniform pure white or purple, cut stem square ½ inch from taproot.

Cucumbers – sizes should be uniform for the variety, round, not much curve, end blunt, not pointed, and ½ inch of stem attached. **Do not wax**, but clean with a soft brush to avoid reducing natural bloom. Bloom is its garden growing color. Do not remove spines. Be sure to enter in proper class, whether slicers or pickles. Slicers: 1½ to 2 inches in diameter and length no longer than 10 inches. Pickling length: Sweet (3 to 3½ inches); Dill (4 to 5½ inches).

Eggplant – medium size, mature, no irregular shape, deep purple or whatever proper color, glossy, not dull, no bronze or green-white streaks, blossom scar should be small and circular, green calyx with 1½ inch of stem attached. Do not wash, but use a soft brush to clean. It must be firm.

Endive – minimum diameter is 10 inches, fringed, and broadleaf – separate classes, outer leaves green, centers creamy white and prominent, root cut ½ inch, regular arrangement of leaves, with no removal gape, must be fresh, tender and crisp.

Kale – minimum spread of 12 inches or more diameter, uniform color, leave curled, and uniform spread, roots cut ½ inch square, no wilting or insect damage.

Kohlrabi – trim stems of leaves to 3 inches, roots trimmed to ½ inch, pale green or light purplish according to variety, smooth, flesh firm, crisp, and tender. The skin should be firm, not tough.

Lettuce – types are crisp heads, butterhead, cos/Romaine and loose-leaf. Head lettuce should be 6 inches in diameter, except Bibb should be 3 inches to 4 inches. Heads should be tight but soft, intense color varies with variety, and should have bright appearance, trim roots square to ½ inch, outer damaged leaves removed, check for soft rots in the center. No signs of insects.

Lima Beans – all same variety, well grown with at least 4 seeds showing in pod, uniform in size and shape, equal maturity, pod should be flexible, remain green, no tendency to yellowing, smooth with no vacant spaces, free from blemishes, the pod stem attached. Shown only in pod form, unless shelled dried form.

Okra – tender pods, uniform in size, shape, and straight with stem of 1 inch. Good color as to variety.

Onion – uniform in size, shape, color, and same variety. Spanish should be at least 5 inches in diameter, others can be 2 inches and larger, either globular or flat, some are bottle shape, with small necks, trim roots to ½ inch, no indication of splitting or doubling. Harvest 2-3 weeks before exhibiting and trim stem 1 to 1½ inch so it can dry. You will be **penalized if skin is peeled, exposing fleshy portion**. Bulbs should be clean, free from rot, sprouting and insect damage.

Green onion – trim leaves to 4 to 6 inches above white part and trim roots to ½ inch. Width should be ½ inch at joint where white/green meet.

Parsnip – uniform in size and shape, 1½ to 2½ inches in diameter at crown, smooth, uniformly tapered. Trim tap root to ½ inch and remove side roots, light cream with small core, no skin blemishes or abrasions.

Peppers – uniform in size, shape and color. Some are thin and long, or blocky, or oblong. They may be shown in green or colored states, but **not mixed**. No evidence of sun scald. Smooth, crisp and bright with ¾ inch stem for hot peppers and stem cut to shoulder of sweet peppers.

Popcorn – remove husks, (except ornamental or strawberry corn, with husk attached and pulled back to stem end). Uniform color, shape, size. Ears vary as to variety. Ears well-filled, no gaps, and free from insect damage.

Potato – numerous shapes, sizes, and colors. Only mature specimens, smooth, free from knobby irregularities, eyes shallow and clean. Dig 10 to 15 days before exhibiting to allow time to cure. Wash carefully and dry quickly. No greening skin, uniform, with no evidence of disease, no skin broken, average size.

Pumpkin – many sizes and shapes, deep, uniform ribs with no flat spots, skin breaks or damage from any cause. Trim the stem to 1 to 2 inches. **Be sure to enter in the right class, for HEAVIEST or for PERFECTION. READ SCHEDULE CAREFULLY.**

Radish – fresh, crisp, and bright in color. Trim tops to 1 inch and trim tap roots to 1 inch. No skin breaks or insect damage.

Squash – many summer and winter varieties. All, with few exceptions, are exhibited mature, at proper size and shape as to variety. Uniform, with no skin breaks. Summer squash varieties are **not mature** – the way they are used most readily, although some mature squash are baked. Free from blemish or damage, Trim attached stem to 1 to 2 inches. Note: True pumpkins have ridged stems; true squash have smooth stems.

Sweet Corn – select mature ears that are well-filled to the tip. Ears should have straight rows of milky juicy kernels with no gaps. Trim silks to 1 inch, trim shank to ½ inch. Husk is cut away on one side 2 to 2½ inches to expose kernels.

Sweet Potato – shape and color vary by variety. Uniform in size and shape, no irregularities, blemishes, or any other damage, skin unbroken. Dig sweet potatoes two weeks before exhibiting so they cure, should be firm and clean. May be carefully washed and promptly dried.

Tomato – slicing tomatoes are large and varies color (red, pink, yellow, white). There are some blends, but enter as to variety. Shapes vary, must be uniform in color, size, and shape, fully ripe but firm, free from blemishes, no cracks or rot. The calyx must be in place with stem removed, no bulges, lobes, or irregularities. **Read schedule carefully, especially requirements for miniatures**, which have almost same requirements as above.

Turnips – trim tops to ½ inch. Should be minimum size about 1¾ inch diameter, trim tap root to ½ inch, good color, crisp, bright, no blemishes, uniformity is important, free from disease. Some are white and some purple-skinned or a combination.

Watermelons – mature and typical to variety (size, color, shape and markings), uniform shape, symmetrical without tapered ends or bottlenecks. 1-inch stem attached to avoid bleeding or prevent rot, no decay sunscald or insect damage. Immature specimens are hard, greenish in appearance. Melons should not be washed but carefully cleaned with soft cloth.

Flowers (Cut and Potted)

Asters (an annual) – watch for one side developed more rapidly than the other, which is a fault. Strong stems to support the flower without sagging. Uniform in size, shape, free from disease or insect marks, good color. Buds that show color for the show will disqualify your plant. (If a bud shows color, it means two or more blooms for a class that calls for only one bloom.

Chrysanthemum – show disbudded, as a spray or a potted plant. True to form, size, and color. Evidence of very recent disbudding is a fault. Foliage must be clean, and flower clear in color, with no sign of over-maturity.

Dahlias – top blooms (if frost does not arrive before show), sizes, colors, and shapes conform to variety and schedule. Symmetrical blooms with no multiple or oval centers. Center of bloom should be round, tight, with some bloom to come. Damaged or spent petals removed from the back is a fault, although some leeway may be allowed. Nodding and down-facing blooms is a fault. Two sets of leaves attached to stem is sometimes required. **Read schedule for requirements.** Foliage is necessary for all varieties.

Gladiolus – generally judged according to the North American Gladiolus Council, based on size and number of flowers. 100 size needs at least 15 buds, with 5 open, 4 in color and 16- to 24-inch flowerhead. 200 size needs 18 to 22 buds, with 6 open, 4 in color, and 22- to 26-inch flowerhead. 300 size needs 22 to 26 buds, with 8 to 10 open, 5 in color, and at least a 30-inch flowerhead. **Stem length below flowers should be 35 to 45 percent of total length of specimen.** Shown without foliage, stem straight, can have a slight curve at top, all buds face the same way, and regularly spaced. Spike should taper gracefully, with clean colors, no variations between florets. Form and substance is good evidence of culture. Avoid undersized florets by variety.

Marigolds – very prominent good foliage, uniform blooms. Open centers are faults. Flowers should face up; buds showing is a fault. When schedule calls for one bloom, and there are side-shoots, some showing color it will be disqualified and calls for disbud. No single centers or washed-out look of flowers. Disbud early, as this gives the main bloom a better chance to grow larger. Stem or spray must have foliage. Length of stem is necessary, as it shows good culture.

Zinnias – same as for Marigolds, except Zinnias are more apt to **mildew**, a fungus disease. Watch size of flowers as to variety. There can be singles and doubles as to variety, in both large and small or dwarf. Petals should be regularly arranged, with overlap neatly arranged. Good depth as to size of bloom is important. Color should be clear, not washed out, or muddiness in some shades. Watch insects and blemished leaves or petals of flowers.

Roses – shown according to the American Rose Society, enter according to schedule. Weak stems or too short are faults. Double centers will disqualify. Show singles wide open. Other bloom should be $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ open, the stage depending upon the number of petals of the variety. Center showing in double bloom will not qualify for judging. Clear colors are important and streaked petals or bluing, or green petal blotches are faults. At least two sets of 5 leaves must be attached to the stem. Watch for fungus and disease.