

# BACK TO SCHOOL



# GARDEN Program



# PROGRAM BACKGROUND

The Back to School Garden Program was originally created by ReTreeUS in response to challenges witnessed in school gardens. Since 2012 ReTreeUS has installed over 50 educational orchards throughout Maine, developing and delivering programming, workshops and ongoing support. In addition, ReTreeUS supports school gardens, mainly through implementing its Back to School Garden Program. ReTreeUS' farm to school plan aims to align orchards and gardens with the academic calendar, maximizing garden learning opportunities and increasing garden productivity for cafeterias. Each orchard and school garden serves as an engaging outdoor classroom, collectively reaching more than 16,000 students annually, adding more each year.

# COLLABORATORS

Collaborators on the Back to School Garden effort include Maine Agriculture in the Classroom (MAITC), Maine School Garden Network (MSGN), Independent Retailers Shared Services Cooperative (IRSSC) and Coast of Maine.



# BENEFITS OF SCHOOL GARDENS

A photograph of a wooden raised garden bed filled with young green plants, set against a green background. The garden bed is made of dark wood and contains several small, vibrant green seedlings. Some plants have small yellow labels. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting.

School gardens serve as an outdoor classroom to deepen knowledge and skills around healthy food, environmental stewardship and playing a contributing role in your community. School gardens empower student gardeners and their families, while honing in on softer skills like teamwork, patience, safety and responsibility for others. They directly result in student-led projects, increased hands-on learning in outdoor settings, and garden concepts integrated across the curriculum in science, art, math, social studies, and more.

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# BACK TO SCHOOL GARDEN Program



Garden educators report common challenges: summer maintenance, a limited growing season during the school year, needing more community connections, and growing ample quantities for cafeteria consumption.

This program addresses these issues, especially summer maintenance, while generating abundant harvests for cafeterias and teaching students about essential garden-based lessons.

<https://www.retiree.us/back-to-school-garden-guide>

# FALL PROGRAMMING

The BTSG program is designed to align Maine's growing season with the school calendar for maximum impact. It features vegetables that students can help plant in the spring that require very minimal maintenance/watering over the summer and will then produce a great harvest of winter squash, sunflowers and popping corn just in time for students to come back to school in the fall. After harvesting the garden in September, ReTreeUS is delivering well-established, cold-hardy vegetable seedlings of lettuce, kale, spinach and herbs that will thrive September through December with the season extending row cover, also provided.

These seedlings and row cover greatly extend the growing season for the school gardens and thus the opportunities for experience, learning and food production.



# SPRING PROGRAMMING

Preparation for the BTSG starts in the spring before the school year ends. ReTreeUS will teach students to “sheet-mulch” garden beds using paper and compost that will eliminate weeds and increase fertility/soil quality over the summer. The students can also seed popping corn, sunflowers and winter squash in these mulched beds that will grow through the summer, with minimal maintenance, and will be ready for harvest when they go back to school. Lessons learned over the course of the year include: decomposition, soil building, successional planting and season extension.



# MOMENTUM IS

# Growing!



ReTreeUS recently received a USDA Farm to School Turnkey Grant to support BTSG projects in 10 specific schools and also to work with IRSSC to raise awareness of the program and help create ongoing fundraising opportunities for the program. Funds are being raised for the continued sustainability and growth of the Back to School Garden Program to be implemented in more and more schools each year in the future.

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# HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Work with the IRSSC and ReTreeUS on a coordinated effort by procuring locally grown horticultural products and marketing the program in the Fall and Spring over the next year. Agree to give back a portion of your sale proceeds in support of implementing the Back To School Garden Program throughout the State of Maine.

This is a statewide program, you can have a local school in your area contact us and we will get them involved: [info@retreeus.org](mailto:info@retreeus.org). Supported work will include educational sessions, fall seedling delivery with row cover and supplies for spring mulching and seed planting.

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ReTreeUS: 207-319-4937, IRSSC 603.706.0868



# HOW YOUR DONATIONS WILL BE MANAGED?

Funds raised from a portion of your locally grown horticulture product sales will be sent to Maine Agriculture in The Classroom (MAITC) and deposited into their specific “Back to School Garden” account to administer.

Funds will be distributed by MAITC only to groups working on the BTSG program/for the specific purpose of supporting BTSG projects.

