



**ReTreeUS**

*Planting trees of fruit and seeds of thought*

**Educational  
Orchard and  
Back to School**

**GARDEN Program**





# PROGRAM BACKGROUNDS

**Educational Orchard Program** - Since 2012 ReTreeUS has planted over 70 educational orchards throughout Maine, mostly in schools, providing instruction and working closely with students, teachers and community members in the process. RetreeUS develops and delivers orchard programming, workshops and ongoing support that empower people to grow their own food and be healthy environmental stewards. Each orchard serves as an engaging outdoor classroom, collectively reaching more than 16,000 students annually, adding more each year.

**Back To School Garden Program** - In 2020 ReTreeUS initiated a Back to School Garden Program in response to challenges witnessed in school gardens. ReTreeUS' farm to school plan aims to align orchards and gardens with the academic calendar, maximizing garden/orchard learning opportunities and increasing garden/orchard productivity for cafeterias.

# COLLABORATORS

Collaborators on the Back to School Garden effort include:

Maine Agriculture in the Classroom (MAITC), Maine School Garden Network (MSGN), Coast of Maine, Arbor Day Foundation and Independent Retailers Shared Services Cooperative (IRSSC).



[www.IndependentRetailersCoop.com](http://www.IndependentRetailersCoop.com)





# BENEFITS OF SCHOOL GARDENS AND ORCHARDS

School gardens and orchards 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 and orchards 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.

# Spring Orchard Programming

In the spring, ReTreeUS visits the educational orchard site to determine the planting location and prep the site with a mulching process. This provides a great opportunity to learn about decomposition and soil life. ReTreeUS works closely with the orchard location hosts to determine the best location, varieties and get everything set up for a successful fall orchard planting process and for a fruitful orchard future.



# Fall Orchard Programming

In the fall ReTreeUS arrives at schools with the ReTreeUS Fruit Tree Mobile full of fruit trees and other supplies needed to install an educational orchard. Planting workshops include as many students and community members as possible to help plant the trees. Program Manager, Richard Hodges has decades of experience as an outdoor educator and leads the planting workshop; starting with a lesson, tree planting demonstration and safety/instruction overview, and then assists all workshop participants as they plant the trees and celebrate the experience of the day and what it means for the future! Following the planting, ReTreeUS stays in regular communication with the designated school Orchard Caretaker with reminders and support regarding ongoing maintenance. ReTreeUS staff return for pruning, grafting and other orchard education related workshops.



# Pollination

We couldn't be without bees... or butterflies, birds and beetles.



## BEE-HIND the SCENES



We can thank pollinators for 3 out of every 4 mouthfuls of food we eat! By transporting pollen from one plant to another, pollinators play a crucial role in the production of fruit and seeds that feed us and other animals.

## WHO'S DOING the BUSY WORK?



Birds, butterflies, moths, flies, beetles, wasps, small mammals and bees.

## BEE-ING the HELPING HAND



By growing flowering plants we are providing pollinators with important food — pollen and nectar — and habitat.

## ORCHARD ACTIVITY



Can you find any of the following?

*Pollinators in action, flowers, fruit (which types?), seeds, other wildlife...*



ReTreeUS Educational orchards by ReTreeUS [retreus.org](http://retreus.org)

ReTreeUS installs permanent education signs at school orchards such as this one about pollination.

# 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.retree.us/back-to-school-garden-guide>

# Back to School 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.



# Back to School 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.





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