

FRESH from the Garden

In the News: Bethelpionics

Bethel Elementary School in Midland, NC was featured in the December KidsGardening newsletter. [Read about their Carton 2 Garden Contest project.](#)

Maybe you'd like to enter the Carton 2 Garden Contest! Find more application details [here](#); the deadline is March 25, 2019.



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Bethelpionics

"We expanded our garden into a sensory-rich playground where nature became a teacher, where hands-on learning was the norm instead of the exception, where active learning took place and multiple learning styles were engaged, and where teamwork, cooperation, respect, and responsibility naturally occurred among students," shares Bethel Elementary School Library Media Coordinator Melissa Buchanan about their Midland, North Carolina, school's award-winning 2017 Carton 2 Garden Contest project.



Inspired by a visit to neighboring school garden, Melissa's students decided to use the Carton 2 Garden challenge to dive into the world of hydroponics. They built three innovative, floating raft beds using collected milk cartons, a few pieces of lumber, plastic liners, insulation boards, and an air pump. The 4th graders researched and then designed the beds, creating their own blueprints and generating a supply list. They then got to watch their plans come to life by helping with the construction of the beds, which were built on top of concrete in a courtyard. Students drilled pilot holes and screws, laid the plastic liner, hammered in the supports, mixed the hydroponic growing solution and filled the beds. Melissa noted that for most of her students, this was the first time that they had ever used construction tools. They named their project 'Bethelpionics'.

KidsGardening and Nutritower team up for giveaway

Amy has been drooling over the Nutritower, a vertical hydroponics system designed for homeowners, so also well-suited for school use. The trouble is, they're pretty pricey, and as a former classroom teacher, Amy knows that it will may be a tough sell as a garden compliment. In the same vein, she knows that it would be an awesome indoor gardening addition and would provide extended learning opportunities.

[Click here](#) to find out more, and to enter to win a Nutritower for your classroom!



Winter Maintenance



Public gardens have lots of winter maintenance tasks that revolve around night tours, some even featuring light shows. That may not be an ambition of the school garden, but there are some tasks at hand as we put our raised beds to rest for a couple of months and look ahead to preparations to get back in the garden in February.

First, clean out your beds of all plant material, weeds and crops that are spent, and put them in the compost bin. Of course, leave your strawberries in place, but clear away any weeds.

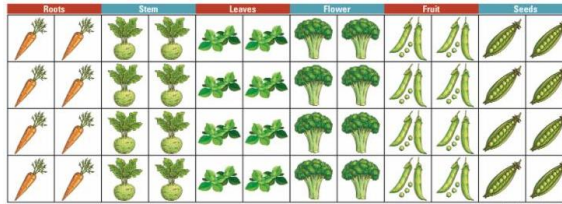
Next, carefully roll or fold up any frost blankets and store them in your garden shed. It is a good idea to put all the covers in some sort of container to keep them "clean" and to prevent damage from any tools that might snag or tear them. You can leave hoops up, as you will need them at the beginning of the season in February. Sand bags should be stored out of direct sunlight to prevent breakdown of the bags. Roll up hoses and store them in the garden shed. Drain the hoses before putting them away to prevent any damage during a freeze event. If you plan to have students re-grid your beds in February, remove the string and nails now.

Now is a good time to take inventory of what you will need in February to get started. Need extra sand bags? You can buy 100 for under \$35. Do you have fertilizer on hand that will need to be applied 2-3 weeks before planting in February? You might find a sale on it this time of year. Are all of your irrigation supplies working properly? If not, replace now, so you aren't scrambling when you need them.



Planning for Your Spring Garden

With a break from the harvest, it's a great time to plan and schedule, especially if you plan to start your own transplants. How many kohlrabi, broccoli, Swiss chard, etc., will you need for your garden? (Remember, the school year coordinates best with cool season crops. Unless you are able to manage the garden over the summer, warm season crops such as tomatoes, peppers and melons are not a good fit.) Once you know how many plants you need, you can plan to grow some of them under your light banks starting the first week in January. Yes, January! Gardening is a winter activity as well, that starts indoors. Many teachers have found out how much their students love to come to class to see how much their seedlings have grown since the previous day. Could a writing assignment accompany these daily visits to the light bank?



Be sure you have seeds, soil, flats, inserts, humidity domes and labels before Winter Break so that you are ready to go when you return to school in January. If you plan to plant pollinators in or near your raised beds now is a good time to get some of those plants started as well. Consider trying coneflower, Stokes aster or bee balm, which are all spring bloomers. Chase away those winter blues by nurturing the first signs of spring right in your classroom.

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Questions? Contact us!

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