



September 15, 2013

A Request for Help:

The Connecticut School Garden Resource Center (CT-SGRC) is asking for your help distributing a simple online survey to collect information on statewide interest and support for edible school gardens. Launched by Common Ground in partnership with the Green Village Initiative, the School Garden Resource Center supports the creation and effective use of educational vegetable gardens in schools. We help schools build, maintain and sustain thriving school garden programs by using our knowledge and resources to build school gardens, assist with the development of standards based school garden curricula and after-school programs, train teachers and garden coordinators in how to effectively utilize school gardens, and provide ongoing technical support to schools as needed. We are committed to building a thriving network of educators state wide who are committed to educational gardens and the benefits that robust school garden programs can deliver.

According to State Board of Education member Terry Jones, Member of the Boards Student Health Advisory Group; "A well run school garden provides students with hands-on experience growing food that has many potential benefits. When properly integrated into the curriculum, garden based lessons are a powerful tool for reinforcing a wide variety of academic concepts and skills, for teaching important lessons in nutrition and health, for supporting the implementation of the Common Core, and for getting young people engaged in learning. Students engaged in hands on work in the garden are often better able to understand the relevance of the academic concepts being applied, and gain a sense of purpose for what they are learning. Finally, school garden programs are an effective way to increase parental involvement in school related activities.

The School Garden Resource Center is asking schools throughout Connecticut to provide information that will help determine how they can best support school gardens across the state. Your participation will help ensure schools receive the assistance they want and need to make school gardens work for them."

Please use this link to access a brief online survey that is designed to gather some basic information on school gardens within your district: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/CTschoolgardens>. Please forward this letter and survey link to representatives at schools in your area who you think might best respond to this inquiry. Multiple responses from each school are welcome! We will summarize and share survey results with all participating schools and districts in early 2014.

Thank you very much with your help with this effort. Please feel free to contact Jesse Delia with any questions you might have. She can be reached at Common Ground - 203-389-4333 ext 221.

Sincerely,

*The Connecticut School Garden Resource Center*

## Why School Gardens?

### **School gardens are powerful learning labs.**

A school garden program offers students place-based experiences that deeply impact their understanding of food, health, nature and community. Successful garden programs provide hands-on, standards-based, interdisciplinary learning opportunities that can:

- Improve test scores
- Fight childhood obesity
- Promote physical activity
- Expose kids to healthy foods and change eating habits
- Create positive connections to nature.
- Teach skills outlined in Common Core standards
- Build community and provide calming schoolyard space for group meetings

**But not all school gardens are delivering these results.** In order to be successful, a school garden program must have sustained support from the school community, become an integral part of the curriculum, and be a source of relevant learning experiences for all students. We have created the School Garden Resource Center to serve as the resource hub for materials, supplies, training and support.

# The Connecticut School Garden Resource Center

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For over a decade Common Ground, a center for environmental learning and leadership in New Haven, CT, has operated a school field trip program that provides hands-on experiences in its educational garden to deliver Connecticut state-standards based lessons in science to children in grades K-8. Based on the reputation of its garden based field trip program, Common Ground receives calls from teachers and parents throughout the state every year asking for help building an edible garden for use by their school. In order to adequately respond to these calls for help, in 2012 Common Ground partnered with the Green Village Initiative (GVI), which has built over 20 school gardens in Bridgeport, to establish the Connecticut School Garden Resource Center (CT-SGRC). Operated by Common Ground, the CT-SGRC supports school gardens in a number of ways, including:

- Helping to plan, build and maintain school gardens
- Providing professional development for teachers who wish to integrate school garden based lessons aligned with state standards into their curriculum
- Helping develop school garden based after-school programs and providing environmental educators to run them at schools

The CT-SGRC has operated primarily in New Haven and Bridgeport but is now looking for ways to expand its programs to reach schools and students throughout the state. We will accomplish this primarily by partnering with and supporting community based organizations in other parts of the state that would like develop their own school garden support programs.

Currently, the CT-SGRC is collecting data on school gardens throughout the state using an on-line survey. If you are part of a school based community and interested in school gardens please feel free to respond to our survey by following the link below. Likewise, if you know someone in a school that is interested in school gardens, please feel free to forward them the link to the survey and encourage them to respond. We are happy to receive multiple survey responses per school and are hoping to collect at least one response from every school in Connecticut.

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/CTschoolgardens>

