



THE LOUISIANA FARM TO SCHOOL PROGRAM

Putting Your School Garden To Bed

Many school garden teachers in Louisiana find themselves in a predicament at the end of each school year when their garden is in full production, but school is closing for the summer. Instead of committing a fellow teacher, volunteer, or custodian to tend to the garden during the hottest months, we spoke with Lafayette Parish's newly retired, LSU AgCenter Horticulture Agent Dan Devenport. Dan suggests that classrooms **break down their gardens before leaving for the summer months**. In doing so, teachers, custodians, and volunteers get to enjoy their well-earned summer break and the garden will need much less work to prepare for planting in the Fall! Check out our quick guide below on how to put your school garden to bed so it will be ready for learning and fun when kids return to the classroom in August.

Before leaving for Summer:

Start, by **removing all plants from the garden**. This is the first step for all options listed below.

Option 1:

- Cover soil with a dark weed barrier ([geotextile fabric](#)) or cardboard that will **not allow light** to reach the soil in order to prevent weed growth. The fabric can be held down with stakes, cinderblocks, etc. as long as it does not hold water.

Option 2:

- If your garden had pests or disease, summer is a great time to use [solarization](#), a process using heat from sunlight to eliminate nuisances from the garden.
- After removing plants, turn the first 6-8 inches of soil to remove large clumps and thoroughly water the beds. A day or two after watering the bed, add a **clear plastic cover** to the garden that fits tightly over the soil. The hot Louisiana sunlight will essentially heat the bed and kill pests and weeds after 6 weeks.

Option 3:

- Plant a [cover crop](#) in your school garden. A cover crop is a plant that requires little to no maintenance and completely covers the garden area while enhancing soil fertility to benefit your future crops.
- Common cover crops used in the summer in the South include sudex, southern peas or cowpeas, and millet.

Returning to School in the Fall:

- Remove **geotextile fabric, cardboard** or **clear plastic**. If using clear plastic, remove and let the soil cool off for a few days.
- To “wake up” garden beds from **cover crops**, simply uproot the cover crops, allow them to dry in the sun, and turn them about an inch under the soil to boost your soil’s health for another year of school gardening. Another option is to compost the cover crop.
- Fertilize and mix soil.
- You’re ready to plant! Be sure to [rotate crops](#) to help plants stay disease-free with healthy soil.
- Enjoy seeing your new student’s enthusiasm blossom for their new Fall garden and check out our [Seeds to Success Facebook group](#) to connect with fellow Louisiana gardeners and teachers in an open, interactive forum.



For More Information

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