



American Heart Association®

Teaching Gardens®

# Plant Day Celebration Tips

It is an exciting day when your garden plan is finalized, and you are ready to prepare your site for planting! If you are building raised beds with frames, preparing your garden will begin a few days before to put your raised bed frames together, place them and fill them with soil.

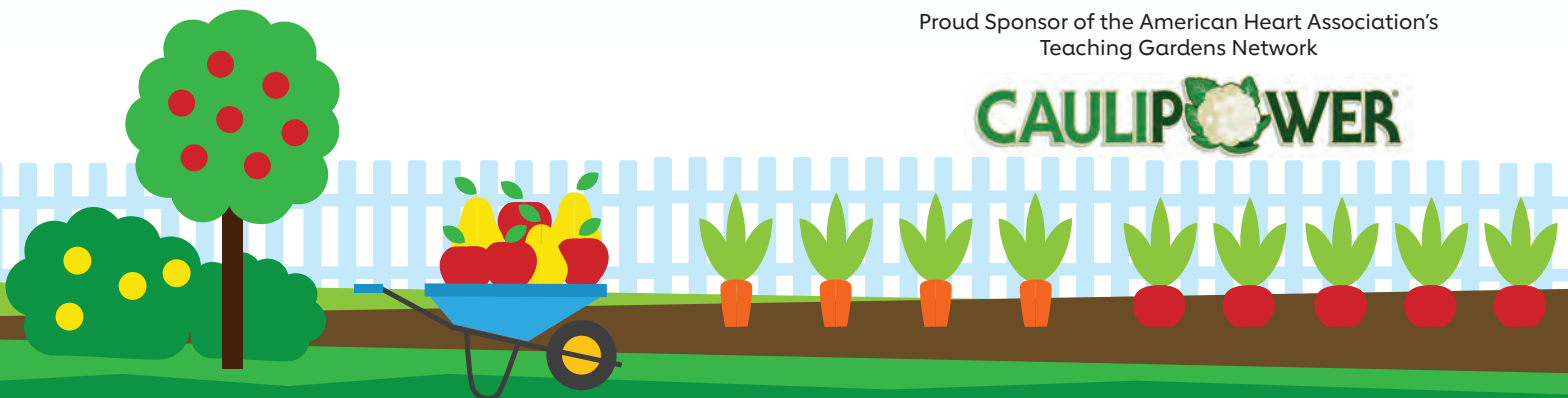
If you also opted for in-ground beds, check with your school district and local utility companies to make sure no underground pipelines or cables run where you plan to dig. And be sure you have the soil tested for lead.

Before Plant Day, decide what plants should be ordered and how they will be distributed. When plants are delivered to your school, place them in a secure area with plenty of sunlight, and water them as needed. Gather the equipment you will need for bed preparation and Plant Day.

You will also want to discuss how to safely conduct your plant day. Be sure to follow local health department guidelines for social distancing, wearing masks and washing hands frequently.

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## Volunteers

Volunteers are a key resource to help prepare your garden and assist on Plant Day. They can also help with garden maintenance and teaching. Ideally, your School Garden Committee coordinates garden volunteers. Although establishing a volunteer corps can be time-consuming, it will result in a dedicated and reliable group that provides ongoing, energetic help.

Decide on a few basic roles for volunteers, and ask all new volunteers where they might fit in. Depending on each volunteer's chosen role, provide information on your school's gardening practices, garden safety rules and class management policies. Establish a schedule and a method to communicate with volunteers.

Hold regular volunteer meetings to discuss upcoming lessons or tasks, address problems and questions, and let the volunteers know how valuable they are. Make volunteer appreciation a major theme of garden events and assign students to write thank-you letters to garden volunteers.

## Media Coverage

Local newspapers, as well as radio and TV stations, are often eager to publicize their communities' school garden programs. Media coverage can increase community attention and support.

Invite members of the local media to any school garden event or call the newspaper whenever something interesting is happening at your school. Let the paper know about photo opportunities that might be of interest.

You can also have a volunteer take pictures of your Plant Day event to share with the media.

Students can be involved in public relations as well. Here are a few ways students have publicized their garden activities:

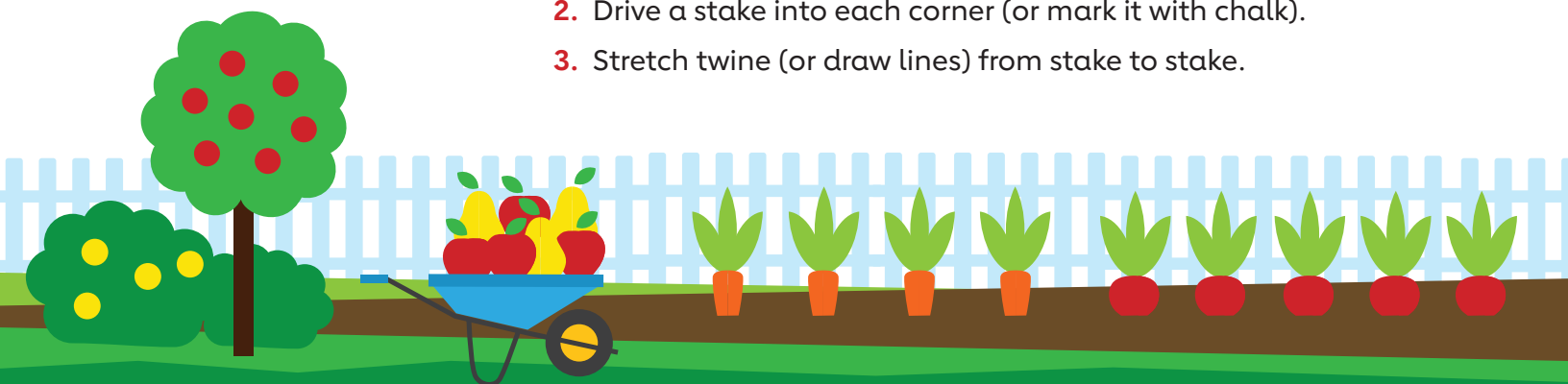
- First-graders read their garden poems on local public radio.
- A sixth-grade class compiled and called in weather reports to a local radio station.
- Students worked together to write a media release about an upcoming Plant Day.

*A sample media release is in the appendix.*

## Preparing the beds

First, with the help of your students, volunteers and the site plan, mark off the garden perimeter with stakes and string or sidewalk chalk. Here's how:

1. Locate the corners of the entire garden area.
2. Drive a stake into each corner (or mark it with chalk).
3. Stretch twine (or draw lines) from stake to stake.



Once you have the perimeter in place, use your garden map and measuring tape to plot the paths and boundaries between garden beds. Allow about 3 feet between beds, which is wide enough for wheelchairs and wheelbarrows to pass through. Mark these boundaries with chalk or pound stakes into the corners for each bed and string twine around the stakes.

If you are using container gardens, place them in the appropriate space a day or two ahead of Plant Day. Large plants such as tomatoes and squash should be grown in containers that hold more than 4 gallons of soil. Smaller containers are suitable for shallow-rooted crops such as lettuce, spinach, onions, strawberries and herbs.

Punch or drill holes in the bottom of your containers for drainage. Line containers that need lining (such as baskets or fruit crates) with a double layer of plastic, and punch holes through the plastic. Fill containers with a light planting mix rather than soil. You can make your own by combining one-third compost, one-third coco pith and one-third horticultural sand.

Next, prepare the soil for planting. Check the soil moisture by squeezing a handful of soil into a ball in the palm of your hand. The soil should keep its shape when you open your hand but crumble when touched.

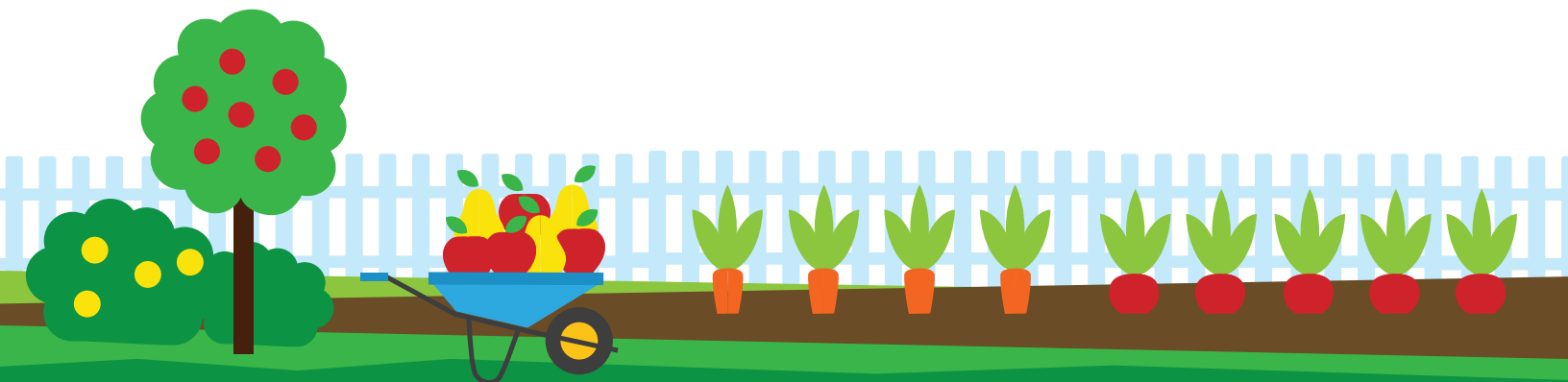
If soil sticks to your shoes or tools, it is too wet for digging. Wait a few days and test the soil until the optimum moisture level is reached. But if your soil is very dry and dusty, water it thoroughly and let the area sit for a few days to attain an ideal moisture level.

If you tested the soil for nutrient content and texture when planning your garden, use the test results to determine whether you need to add any soil amendments.

**Finally, here is how to prepare the soil for planting:**

1. Clear all plants and other debris off the bed.
2. Add compost and other amendments to the surface.
3. Thoroughly turn over and loosen the soil, using a digging fork or spading fork, to a depth of 12 inches, breaking up any clods.
4. Rake the surface smooth and level.

Once you have used your beds for a season or more, those steps become quick and easy.



### Here are some tips for working the soil with students:

- When demonstrating how to use a tool, always review safety rules such as not leaving tools on the ground and keeping metal parts of tools below the hips.
- Students can add a layer of compost by scooping handfuls from a pile or wheelbarrow and sprinkling them over the bed.
- Space students more than 6 feet apart when digging or raking.
- Younger students can help dig beds with hand trowels. They may not make much progress, but they will get the idea of bed preparation and be excited to be involved. Review tool guidelines and demonstrate how to dig without flinging dirt into the air (and others' faces).
- After digging, it is important to not step on beds — this will compact the soil and hinder plant growth.

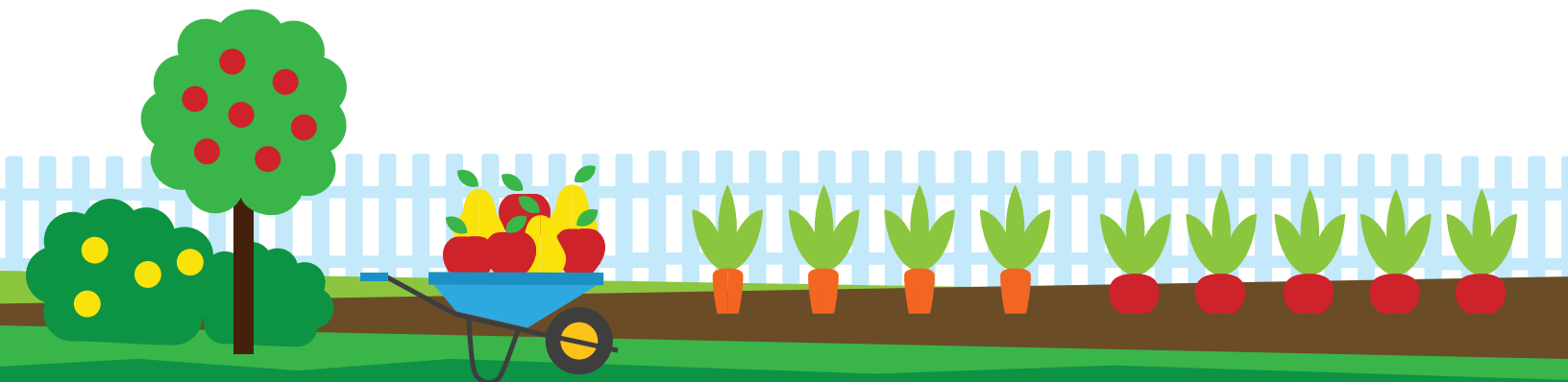
### Plant Day Activities

Now the big fun begins. With your volunteers, determine your schedule for the day. You could rotate grades in and out of the garden so all students can participate. You might end the day with a celebratory all-school assembly. Be sure to follow local public health guidance to safely conduct your activities.

You could create activity stations throughout the garden or as a part of the end-of-day assembly. Here are some ideas for activity stations:

- **Healthy food tasting:** Students taste three different fruits or vegetables.
- **Fruit and vegetable bingo:** Create a bingo game with pictures of various fruits and vegetables. Prizes could include fresh fruit or vegetables or another healthy snack.
- **Seedling pots:** Students plant seeds into cups that they may take to the classroom or home.
- **Rock art:** Students paint garden themes on rocks. The art can be displayed in the garden.
- **Plant markers/garden labels:** Students create plant markers for the garden on Popsicle sticks or something similar.
- **Guess the plant:** Place various small plants in a paper bag. Students close their eyes, feel the plant and guess what it is.

After your successful Plant Day, be sure to work with all teachers to create a schedule for lesson plans and garden maintenance.



# APPENDIX

## Sample Media Release

Here is a sample media release you can edit for your Plant Day.  
Be sure to use school letterhead when sending it.

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

(Today's Date)

Contact Name

School Name

School Address

Contact's Phone Number

Contact's Email

(Your School Name) announces its American Heart Association Teaching Garden Plant Day Celebration

(City, State Dateline) — (School Name) is excited to announce the opening of its new American Heart Association Teaching Garden and Plant Day Celebration at (time) (date).

(School Name's) celebration will include (activities, for example, garden crafts, refreshments and live music). All parents are welcome.

The (School Name) Teaching Garden combines nutrition education with garden-based learning. Numerous studies have shown that school garden programs can improve student attitudes toward fruits and vegetables. (School Name) staff and students are excited to cultivate healthy bodies and minds in the garden!

For more information about this event or how you can contribute to the gardening efforts, contact the school.

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