

Top School Garden Picks for 2012!

'Farm to School' is a national initiative that affords schools the opportunity to feature locally grown food in school meals. School gardens play an integral part in that process by providing teachers with a tangible, ongoing connection for students between where and how food is grown and processed. Many schools celebrate education by incorporating garden-based education into their curriculum. October is National 'Farm to School' Month. The Arizona Department of Education is excited to recognize three outstanding programs statewide that extend the learning environment beyond traditional classroom walls. Schools were selected for their student involvement, community participation, school-wide implementation, and garden-based program standards in program curriculum.

[Brunson-Lee Elementary School's Community Garden](#) was founded in 2010 with help from a diverse group of community members. Their mantra: "Growing to Give". Principal Mario Tijerina encourages his students to lead by example and to dream big; beyond their means, so together they can build a better future for their community. With 90% of the student population eligible for free and reduced priced meals, it might be expected that these children would focus on satisfying their basic hunger needs rather than focusing on nutritional values and food diversity. Instead, teachers creatively assimilate Arizona education standards by incorporating garden-based curriculum. Together students embrace family involvement through community enrichment. Their garden was created for, and is sustained by the community, further enhancing student pride. The school is surrounded by four garden plots containing vegetables and fruit trees, as well as a beautiful mural as a backdrop. For more information please contact Mario Tijerina at mtijerina@balsz.org.



[Hidden Hill Elementary School's Garden](#) was founded in 1998 with garden gurus, Lois and Stan Farlin who spend much of their free time tending to the gardens at Hidden Hills Elementary. There are 23 gardens that surround the campus which include a hummingbird habitat, butterfly habitat, wildlife pond and habitat, a desert tortoise habitat, salt water aquarium, and a hydroponic garden. Arizona academic standards are incorporated into the school garden/habitat curriculum, with a special emphasis on math and science. On a daily basis, students from every classroom are directly involved in the maintenance and sustainability of the program, accounting for half of their efforts. Additionally, students participate in writing garden grants, community work days for large projects, farmers' markets, after school service hours, and in the after school garden club. For more information on the Hidden Hills Elementary Garden Program please contact Lois and Stan Farlin at sfarlin@cox.net.



[Manzo Elementary School's Garden](#) is located in the heart of Barrio Hollywood, an area of Tucson where the culture is rich and the pride is strong. That pride, however, was not always so apparent. Three years ago, the Manzo Elementary administration took their students' behavioral issues, below standard test scores, and lack of interest for education into their own hands; that is the students' hands. The garden is a place for students to learn the Arizona academic standards contextually, release underlying frustrations and develop a sense of accomplishment, all in the name of *familia* (Spanish for family) pride. With a highly indigenous population, students at Manzo learn about the native crops from their heritage, on which their families were raised. Crops are selected based on their return on investment, their adaptability to the arid climate, and are only limited to the confines of campus. With a hen house, a tortoise habitat, a vegetable garden, several rainwater cisterns, a few native plant gardens and an aquaponic system, it is clear that this is more than education; it's a way of life. Science and math curriculum are centered around reconciliation ecology, a science based on the restoration of natural habitats for plant and wild life in places where people reside. For more information please contact Moses Tompson at Moses.Tompson@gmail.com. Visit [Manzo's Ecology Program](#) on Facebook .



This institution is an equal opportunity provider.