

# Working with Youth Education Programs

**S**chools are an excellent place to discuss integrated pest management (IPM) practices as part of an overall program that teaches children to respect and care for their environment. Most children are fascinated by “bugs.” School gardens offer opportunities for several curricula, including ecology, biology, botany, and environmental affairs.

In addition to the educational benefits of working with youth, there is an added benefit of providing a community service. By sending a district representative to local schools, you are providing expertise to teachers and students. This community relations effort enforces public perception of your district’s concern for health and safety issues.



**With all youth education programs and literature, always include a warning that pesticides should be handled only by adults.**

## School Garden Projects

Many schools, especially at the elementary level, offer garden projects. These gardens are usually on school property and give children the chance to experience gardening first hand. Students take an active role in the development and maintenance of these gardens, either during their class time or as a special club or after-school project.

“Hands-on” activities for school gardens may demonstrate the importance of IPM techniques such as mulching to prevent weeds. Creating an environment for “good bugs” — such as ladybugs that control pests on plants — is a natural attraction for children. They can also learn about the proper care and feeding of garden plants. Other “hands-on” instruction may include pest prevention by covering household refuse, cleaning up lawn and garden debris, and the care and feeding of pets.

The best way to determine if schools in your area offer garden projects is through direct contact. Start by contacting the school district offices nearest your facility. They may have a record of school garden projects. If that doesn’t work, call individual schools. Ask to speak with the principal, vice principal, or a student activities director. Explain that you are available as a resource, and that you would be happy to come to the school and offer a brief presentation about IPM as part of biology, ecology or botany curricula.

You may want to develop youth-oriented materials to send the school. These materials can range from color pages to fact sheets, depending on grade levels. Ask the school contact person what types of materials would be most useful. Offer to be a resource for other student-centered activities such as science fairs, environmental projects, or curriculum development. You also could offer your facility for a student field trip, if the school conducts such activities.

### Evaluation of Method

**Pros:** This type of outreach would be an excellent opportunity for children to learn about pesticide use in a garden environment. Students have direct contact with a person who can explain IPM techniques and answer their questions. Children are likely to share the information with their parents.

**Cons:** The time it would take to locate schools with student gardens, and the time it would take for a presenter to visit individual schools are a key drawbacks for this option.

Also, there may be a negative reaction from some parents if schools use pesticides around their gardens, or indirectly discuss the use of pesticides as part of a gardening program.

### Supplementing Recycling Programs

Environmental topics are often discussed in classrooms. Recycling is one of the most successful school environmental programs. Topics range from source reduction to composting, and they offer excellent opportunities to get students involved. One way to increase awareness of pest control issues is to tap into school campaigns that focus on recycling.

Recycling programs often incorporate other environmental elements, such as composting and the re-use of items to decrease waste. With IPM, consumers work with nature to create an environ-

ment where it is difficult for pests to survive. Under certain conditions, IPM may also reduce the amount of pesticides used, and therefore decrease the number of discarded containers. It is important to note that pesticide containers should never be recycled. Recycling programs may also include safety information on household hazardous waste, and how adults should properly dispose of such waste.

Contact the schools directly, introduce yourself and the resources you offer, and ask about current recycling programs. Offer to enhance the current program with information about IPM practices, such as handouts for use by teachers. There is also the opportunity to offer schools a guest speaker on the subject of using garden products wisely, employing IPM practices, and how improper use and disposal of pesticides can impact water quality. Position yourself as a source of information that can be utilized for environmental studies.

### Evaluation of Method

**Pros:** Students are educated about IPM and its relationship to recycling. Children can then relay what they've learned to their parents, and influence their parents' wise use of pesticides.

**Cons:** It requires considerable time and effort to contact schools, find out what types of recycling/environmental programs they offer, and get information to teachers. This effort could be greatly reduced by employing other special interest groups to aid in outreach efforts.

## Poster Contest

Another way to educate children about IPM is to hold a poster contest. Poster contests have long been used to gain attention for issues, especially those related to health issues. The success of a poster contest depends on advance planning.

Timing is an important factor in announcing and holding the poster contest. To coincide with the gardening season, hold the contest in March as the growing season begins. Announce the contest at least a month in advance, to give teachers the time to explain the program to children. Arrange the contest at the beginning of the school year, to give staff time to get the contest on their calendars.

Separate entries into several age categories. It is best to put the elementary grades into two categories (kindergarten to third grade and fourth to sixth grade). Junior high schools and high schools can be put in two categories. Create a one-page sheet that lists all of the requirements for the poster contest. Items such as the size of the poster, the materials to be used (pen and crayons are more colorful than pencil drawings), and the elements that must be included should all be clearly outlined in the requirements. Be sure to include a deadline for submission on the form. You can either have the schools mail you their entries, or you can arrange a time to go and pick

them up. Contest judges should include representatives of your district and the schools. Entries should be judged both on artistic merit and the messages presented.

For best results, a poster contest needs prizes for the winners. Ask local merchants to donate items that you can promote on the entry form. Gift certificates for ice cream, pizza, or other youth-oriented merchandise make popular prizes. T-shirts, hats, or other small give-away items are acceptable prizes if you can't get donated materials. Announce that you will display the winning entries for a specified period of time. Display them at your facility, or better yet, work with a local retail establishment or mall to showcase the prize-winning work.

### Evaluation of Method

**Pros:** Poster contests help students become better educated about an issue.

**Cons:** Dozens of organizations approach schools with poster contests. It doesn't take long for the school year to become saturated with the contests. Contacting the schools early may help in getting your poster contest on the school calendar.