

## Gardening with Teens

### Essential Reading List

***Growing a Life: Teen Gardeners Harvest Food, Health, and Joy.*** Illène Pevec. New Village Press, 2016. 407 pages.

The heart of this book consists of interviews with youth who are engaged in 12 different gardening programs across the United States. They talk about what happens to them emotionally, mentally and physically as they work in gardens: the many ways in which they are growing healthy, happy lives, in addition to fruit and vegetables. At the same time, readers learn how a variety of teen gardening programs can be organized and sustained to serve diverse populations and places, including high school gardens, market gardens, green lots in urban food deserts and rural farms. The book also reviews research that supports the teens' insights. [Link to Publisher](#)

#### **Series: Junior Master Gardener**

Junior Master Gardener, or JMG, is an international child and youth gardening program of the Cooperative Extension network, based in Texas A&M University. It engages young people in hands-on individual and group experiences to cultivate a love of gardening and appreciation of the environment. For its books and curricula for middle school students, explore [their website](#).

- **Junior Master Gardener Level 2 — Operation Thistle**

This curriculum for grades 6–8 engages students in hands-on activities that focus on plant growth and development. In one book, it combines the Teacher/Leader guide with reproducible pages for student activities. It encourages participation in group learning and service learning, and enables students to work toward Junior Master Gardener certification. [Link to Website](#)

- **Junior Master Gardener Level 2 — Operation W.A.T.E.R.**

This module on W.A.T.E.R. (Water And The Earth's Resources) engages students in grades 6–8 in hands-on activities that focus on soil and water. It combines the Teacher/Leader guide with reproducible pages for student activities. It encourages group learning and service learning, and contributes toward Junior Master Gardener Certification. [Link to Website](#)

***The Power of a Plant.*** Stephen Ritz. Rodale Wellness, 2017. 280 pages.

For schools that lack space for outdoor gardens, this book shows how growing food can also be brought indoors and how learning can come alive as students practice growing, cooking, eating and sharing their bounty. The author founded the Green Bronx Machine, a not-for-profit program that combines teaching gardening and green technologies with youth leadership training. The program has increased attendance, graduation rates and passing rates on state exams, and reduced behavioral incidents. Since the book's publication, the program has expanded into elementary schools. [Link to Website](#)

**“Chapter 9: Urban Agriculture as a Tool for Horticultural Education and Youth Development.” Mary A. Rogers. In *Urban Horticulture: Sustainability for the Future* (pp. 211-232). Edited by Dilip Nandwani. Springer Nature, 2018.**

This chapter reviews research on the benefits of gardening for youth: reducing stress; improving attitudes toward school; facilitating collaboration, teamwork and intercultural awareness; improving peer relations and prosocial behavior; and improving self-efficacy and self-esteem. Involving youth in responsibilities such as garden planning and decision-making contributes to higher levels of participation and leadership development. School gardens tend to be concentrated in high-resource schools, indicating a need to bring these opportunities to underserved schools. [Link to Publisher](#)

---

*This list was curated and developed by Illène Pevec, researcher and educator who develops youth gardens at schools and community centers with a current focus on planting more trees at schools, and Louise Chawla, professor emerita with the University of Colorado Boulder and member of the Children & Nature Network’s Scientific Advisory Council.*

---

*This reading list is just one of the resources included in an online toolkit titled **Gardening with Children and Teens**. Find the [full toolkit here](#), in the Children & Nature Network resource hub.*