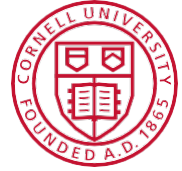


Cornell Cooperative Extension Cornell Garden-Based Learning



Teaching and Learning in the School Garden: Theory into Practice Course Syllabus Spring 2026

Instructor: Donna Alese Cooke dmc72@cornell.edu

Once the course begins, please contact the course instructor via messaging within Moodle. If you would like to meet with the instructor individually via Zoom, reach out to set up a meeting during available Office Hours.

Welcome!

Welcome to the **Teaching and Learning in the School Garden: Theory into Practice** online course. We are pleased that you are inspired to further enrich your practice of garden-based learning in schools.

Focusing on the foundations, benefits, and teaching strategies of garden-based learning (GBL), participants will build a toolbox of resources for developing a school gardening program that meets cross-curricular needs. Case study, research, and GBL resources are evaluated through group discussion, learning activities, and reflective journals. Educational theory will be put into practice using real-world tools, through collaboration, practicum, small and whole group discussion, lesson plan assignments, and the final portfolio project.

Course Schedule

- **April 13-April 19:** Welcome and Introductory Week: Theoretical Roots of Garden-Based Learning
- **April 20-April 26,** Module 1: Youth Development, Community Building & Life Skills in the Garden
- **April 27-May 3,** Module 2: Inclusive School & Youth Gardening Programs; Designing Gardens for Youth
- **May 4-May 10:** Break week
- **May 11-May 17,** Module 3: Conceptualizing Your Program & Curriculum
- **May 18-May 22,** Module 4: Theory into Practice: Connections to Core Content Areas & Beyond
- **May 23-May 25:** Holiday Break
- **May 26-May 31,** Module 5: Designing Project-based Units of Study and Lesson Plans
- **June 1-June 5,** Module 6: Authentic Assessment of Garden Based Learning, Project Portfolio

Although the last day of class is June 5, the due date for assignments in Module 6 and Final Portfolio is June 10. Students can no longer access the course after June 19.

Zoom Q&A Sessions & Office Hours

We have found that students benefit from regular one-hour Zoom Q&A check-ins, where all students come together to review the course content, ask questions, and share ideas and progress. Zoom Q&A are optional and recorded if missed and the dates are:

- April 21, 7pm
- May 12, 12pm
- May 26, 7pm
- June 9-12pm: Share final portfolio

Use this link for each Zoom session:

<https://cornell.zoom.us/j/5108598970?pwd=JYzFPtYDi3tHYycqBTcRRcQiWap6ZH.1&omn=94046373850> If needed: Meeting ID: 510 859 8970. Passcode: 749417

Instructor office hours are available on an individual basis and scheduled on the alternate weeks of the Zoom sessions. Please reach out to the instructor to schedule a personal meeting.

Course Objectives

Upon completion of this course, participants will:

- Identify garden-based learning benefits and successful school garden programs and how learning theory is put into practice.
- Analyze program needs and cross-curricular connections, teaching strategies and challenges for curriculum integration.
- Examine developmentally appropriate garden design for youth and school gardens, that are welcoming, inclusive, and accessible for all.
- Cultivate practical lessons and activities that connect to core content areas including art, music, health, nutrition, technology and more.
- Construct project-based lessons that fulfill educational goals and focus on garden-based learning principles and learner-centered assessment.
- Collaborate and build connections with others and discuss strategies for teaching and learning in the school garden.
- Apply case studies, research, and teaching and learning methods to their own program and lesson planning.
- Assemble and present a portfolio of lesson plans, multi-disciplinary units, and authentic assessment that will enrich a classroom and/or youth program.

By the end of this course, you will connect with and learn from others with the same purpose and become more confident and knowledgeable garden-based learning educators, prepared with fully developed lesson plans and cross-curricular units of study.

Supplies

A computer with reliable high-speed Internet access (to view videos, view readings, submit assignments, and participate regularly in discussion forums). There is no text to purchase.

Approach & Philosophy

This course focuses on the foundations and teaching strategies of garden-based learning (GBL) and provides the tools and resources that classroom teachers and extension educators need to develop school gardening programs that are easily integrated into their school curriculum or youth program. *By the end of this course, you will become a more confident and knowledgeable garden-based learning educator and program planner, and you will connect with and learn from others with the same purpose.*

This course is designed to enhance the practice of garden-based learning in our schools; to promote the integration school gardening into the curriculum through a constructivist, project and place-based learning approach; and to encourage a network of state and nation-wide educators and volunteers who will learn and grow together. This course does not focus on the science of horticulture or aspects of gardening; however, the practicum garden-based learning activities provide context to garden-based learning theories.

My Philosophy as an Instructor

This is an online course that you are likely taking for your professional development as a garden-based learning educator, classroom teacher, school administrator or school garden volunteer. I hope you are intrinsically motivated to expand your knowledge and improve your teaching practice by completing the readings, assignments and learning activities. I will assume that you have read the assigned readings, and I will not "test" you on content, because I do not believe that should be your motivation. My hope is that you will take full advantage of the discussions, which are designed for you to collaborate and communicate with your colleagues freely and often, to learn from one another and explore techniques and strategies that will help you in your professional practice.

Given the flexible nature of the distance learning environment, it is easy to fall behind and lose out on what could be a very valuable learning experience for you. Keeping yourself well organized and current with assignments will help you get the most out of this course. This course has been designed to be learner-centered, and the due dates, deadlines, and self-evaluation exercises are put in place to keep you on track, not as a means of penalizing you. Stated simply, you will get from the course what you put into it.

Our communication will be positive and will focus on course content. Rules of 'Netiquette' will be followed, therefore rude or offensive language and overly critical commentary will not be tolerated. It is a course taken for enrichment, and the way we communicate with one another should be encouraging and constructive. Please be open with your feedback and feel free to contact us with any questions. An open dialogue is encouraged and welcomed.

What to Expect

You will learn online asynchronously, at your own pace. Anyone enrolled in this course is expected to participate in all learning activities. For your own peace of mind and time management, submit all assignments by each deadline. Your online presence through interactive online discussion forum is essential. It provides an opportunity to ask questions while encouraging a network of state and nation-wide educators, volunteers, and communities to learn and grow together.

Plan to dedicate about 5 or more hours per weekly topic for online readings and assignments. Should you take extra time to explore the optional topics and additional resources in each section, expect to add on another hour or two. Given the flexible nature of a distance learning environment, it is easy to fall behind and lose out on what could be a very valuable learning experience for you. Keeping yourself well organized and current with assignments will help you get the most out of this course.

Academic Integrity

Participants are expected to do their own work unless otherwise instructed (e.g. group work). Any assignments should be your original work done, and to avoid plagiarism, other people's

work should be properly referenced. Works that are copied from other students or plagiarized in any way will not be graded or evaluated.

Course Content & Assessment

Weekly modules will open on a Monday and contain the following components:

- A series of lessons that present the topic with required readings, videos, and online resources that expand upon and reinforce the material presented
- Lessons and resources that help create an inclusive school garden design that is welcoming and accessible for all
- Activities and assignments that build a portfolio, a toolbox of GBL program plans, evaluative tools, and standards-based cross-curricular and project-based lessons
- Whole class discussion forum with topics and questions for discussion, and a place to share ideas with others.
- Reflective writing that cultivates a thoughtful perspective and dialogue with the course instructor.
- Additional readings, activities, and relevant resources.

The final project is a portfolio that consists of a compilation of all the assignments completed in this course, so all assignments should follow the theme or topic of your final portfolio project. This portfolio will serve as your "toolbox" of garden-based learning activities and program guides. Teachers can develop of project-based unit of standards-based lessons specific to their grade level, or extension educators and youth workers can develop a comprehensive plan that will guide a youth gardening program. You may choose the format of your portfolio, as a PowerPoint presentation, or one complete .pdf or Word document. In the end, you will leave this course with a final portfolio of garden-based learning activities and program planning guides ready to use in the classroom or your program area.

Journal Entries

Within each module you will be asked to submit a journal entry, where you will share your thoughts and ideas with your instructor who in turn will offer you constructive feedback throughout the course. Please keep in mind that this is a self-reflective activity, not a sounding board! Suggested writing prompts will be posted in Moodle; however, you are free to explore other topics if they relate to the course. The purpose of the journal is for you to reflect on something you have learned and take this knowledge to further your program planning.

Grading

While there are no accumulative grades for this course, all assignments are designed to help keep you on track and evaluate your understanding of the content. Assignments are expected to be completed on or before their due dates and will be evaluated on an

Exemplary/Developing/ Emerging basis for you to track your progress.

Exemplary: Student has submitted assigned task on time, referred to course materials to answer all questions and/or complete all assigned tasks

Developing: Student submitted assigned task on time, referred to course materials to answer some of the questions and/or completed some assigned tasks

Emerging: Student is just beginning to demonstrate learning in relation to the content, may or may not have referred to course materials to answer some of the questions and/or may or may not have completed some assigned tasks

No grade: Did not submit the assignment by the end of the course.

Continuing Education Credits

This course is non-credit; however, we award the following to all who successfully participate and complete the course and all required assignments. Refer to the Course Completion Requirements Rubric if you wish to earn credit for this course.

- Cornell University Continuing Education Credits: You may receive Continuing Education Units (CEUs)
- NYS Certified Teachers: Cornell Garden-Based Learning is now an Approved Continuing Teacher and Leader Education (CTLE) Sponsor from NYSED
- If you are post-secondary undergraduate or graduate student, explore the possibility with your faculty advisor of receiving credit for the course (typically as independent study) using your CEU's as evidence of your completion.

Cornell Continuing Education Units and NYSED CTLE Course Completion Requirements Rubric

Successful completion of this course is evaluated based on "Complete" criteria in the green column. Moodle will automatically mark required activities as "done" when completed.

Required Activity	Complete	Incomplete	Comments
Lessons Modules 1-6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viewed and read each page of each lesson • Completed each lesson activity to the end 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did not view any of the lesson pages • Did not complete the lesson activity to the end 	Click on "end of lesson" button to complete the lesson activity to the end
Assignments Modules 1-6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submitted all assignments • Received a grade for each assignment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did not submit all assignments in each Module • Did not receive grades for all assignments 	Assignments in 'draft' form cannot be graded- be sure to complete the submission process by receiving confirmation that each assignment was submitted.
Journals Modules 1-6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submitted all Journal entries • Received a grade for each Journal Entry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did not submit all Journal entries • Did not receive grades for all Journal Entries 	Journals in 'draft' form cannot be graded- be sure to complete the submission process by receiving confirmation that each assignment was submitted.
Discussion Forums <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductory Week • Modules 1-5 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Posted an initial discussion in each weekly module • Responded to a least 2 student's original posts • Replied to anyone who responded to your original post 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did not post or engage in each weekly forum 	Post your original discussion in the beginning of each week and respond throughout the week. Each weekly forum ends the following Monday after the module opens
Resources and Optional Activities	There are additional resources and optional activities that students are not required to complete; however, they can be manually marked as 'done' in Moodle to help keep you on track.		