Most school gardens are carved out from lawns surrounding school buildings. When choosing a potential garden site, be sure to consider things such as the sun, wind, proximity to the school building, availability of water, and soil quality. In general, soils are pretty good at school sites, but in some cases building site excavations may have spread clay and/or gravel around buildings. This clay/gravel is sometimes tolerable to lawn grass, but not necessarily to gardens. It’s best to check the soil beforehand to be sure it’s of garden quality.

There are three options for transitioning lawn into a garden space, depending on how far in advance you begin planning.

**Option 1 - One Year in Advance**
If you allow an entire growing season for site preparation, a process called solarization can be used to kill lawn at the future garden site. In solarization, heavy gauge black plastic should be spread over the entire site and weighted down against the wind. This should be done in the spring once the ground is thoroughly moist from the rains, as no water will penetrate the plastic during the treatment. Heat from the sun absorbed and trapped by the plastic coupled with the lack of sunlight will kill the lawn (though most likely not any residual weed seeds in the soil). Tilling of this ground could take place in the fall or wait until the following spring.

**Option 2 - Autumn Before Planting**
Repeated tilling will kill and compost lawns (and any weeds growing in them), but the process is best begun by at least one tilling the fall before planting. This can be done with a big tractor tiller in one pass. Hand tillers, however, might take two or three tillings to adequately plow turf under. Tilling should be repeated again in early spring as soon as the ground can be worked, followed by one final tilling right before planting.

**Option 3 - In the Spring**
If a lawn consists of lawn species only (rather than quack grass or other tough perennials like dandelions), it may be possible to prepare the ground by spring tilling alone. This process will only work if it is started as early in March as the ground can be worked. This initial tilling should be followed by one in April and one more just before planting time in May. Inadequate tilling will result in clumpy ground that is difficult to plant in, as well as still-living clumps of sod and weeds that will be tough to deal with during the subsequent growing season. If this schedule cannot be achieved, it is possible to rent a sod cutter to remove sod first, then till the open ground underneath. This adds potential cost and deprives the ground of composted organic matter from the lawn. However, if removed sod is not reusable, it can be piled, composted, and added back to the garden later. If sod is in good condition, some schools have been able to offset cost by selling it, while other schools have used the sod themselves in another location on school grounds.

**Note on Organic Fertilizers**
In any of the above options, till these in during the final tilling before planting in May.

**Note on Roundup**
It is recommended to avoid using Roundup and other toxic chemicals to kill the lawn in preparation for a garden. Use the alternatives above instead.