

Food Habitat Mapping

What is a food habitat map?

A food habitat map is a visual representation of the school and grounds that shows any areas connected with food and drink.

The aims of this map are:

- To visually show the areas where food is grown, stored, bought, prepared and eaten on the school grounds.
- Show potential areas for increased growing of food or access to naturally growing food.
- Show potential areas where wildlife can interact with food-growing areas, e.g. overgrown corners probably contain a lot of slugs, which may eat young crops; wildflower areas probably attract a lot of pollinators, which can help to pollinate crops.
- Identify where and how litter and waste from food are being managed, and if there are any associated issues.

Preparation

Before you begin creating your food map:

- Think about what you want this map to show and what you would like to learn about your surroundings.
- Are there any issues you want to resolve? E.g. is there food growing in the grounds that is not being harvested and eaten? Is there often food litter found in the yard?

The initial stages will be similar to the preparation stages for the habitat map you may have created during your work on the Biodiversity flag. You could use these maps if still available to guide you.

Key features and areas to include, are where...

- Food is provided/sold on the school grounds including vending machines, canteen, shop etc
- Food is eaten including classrooms, communal break areas, staff room etc
- Food is prepared or stored including kitchen or staff room
- Drinks are provided including water fountains or drinking taps.
- Food wrappers, packaging and other food-associated waste are disposed of.
- Uneaten food is disposed of including brown bins or compost area.
- Food is growing in planted areas outside.
- Food is growing outside naturally on fruit trees, blackberry bushes, nettles, etc.
- Animals are contributing to food production such as beehives, chickens etc.
- There is naturally occurring food for pollinators, e.g. wildflowers for bees.

How to Create a Food Habitat Map

You will need:

- **A clipboard**
- **Pencils/markers**
- **Ruler**
- You could also bring a **camera** to take pictures and a **measuring tape** to record the size of different landscape features.

The first step is to draw your outline of the school building and grounds.

Then Divide the students into smaller groups, once the boundaries of the map is drawn.

Give each group a different task, such as:

- Marking the different important food features on areas of the sketched map.
- Noting any specific relevant information about these features (See sample questions below).
- Using identification keys, identify any crops or wild plants which may provide food, e.g. brambles.
- Using identification keys, identify any plants which may be good for pollinators, e.g. herbs.

Have a list of codes available for things you expect to encounter. For example:

- CB = Compost bin
- SC = School canteen
- RB = Raised bed

School Grounds

Looking at an aerial photo or existing map, before you start to sketch the boundaries, may help to get an overall view of the shape of the buildings and campus.

Walk around the grounds to make sure you are aware of the layout and to help identify every area you may need to

Note details such as: the date, weather conditions or any other special considerations such as; the day the compost bins get emptied, when food deliveries arrive to the school, the planting schedule in the garden; if they are deemed to impact on what you are finding.

As you are looking for areas related to food don't forget to use your other senses. Mark down anywhere you can smell food or hear it being prepared!

Inside:

- Mark on your map any areas related to food: walk the corridors of the school and enter any areas such as canteen, shop, kitchen etc.
- Use one classroom as an example for all others. You don't need to go into each one!
- Note if any food areas such as water fountains are being used by staff or students, if any items are broken or out of bounds, if there are queues to use anything, if any food bins are full etc
- Are there signs of any crops or other plants growing inside, e.g. cress, herbs in windows etc.
- Mark all exits to your garden/outdoors on the map.

Outside:

- Mark down all areas relating to food. Be as specific as possible; e.g. raised bed, flower bed, flowerpot, shrubbery etc.
- When marking food which is growing outside note the type of crop, whether it was planted or growing naturally, whether it has been harvested and eaten before.
- Are there any issues with flower beds? Run down? Overgrown with weeds? Etc.
- Are there any trees or wild-growing plants which produce food? E.g. blackberry bushes, apple and hazel trees. Are the foods produced by these plants ever eaten by staff, students?
- If you have a compost bin investigate if it is producing compost. Find out if compost from it has ever been used on beds. Is it full? Is it attracting wildlife?
- Is there any litter from food sources either outside or inside? Note where/what.

Wildlife Notes

- Are there any wild areas that might be good for providing shelter and food for wildlife? If so, what animals do you think might live in these wild areas, and what might they be able to feed on in your school grounds (see sample questions section below for help with this).
- Are there any manmade food sources for wildlife? If you have bird feeders, make a note of the types of food being provided (seeds, peanuts, lard balls) etc. Also note if you see any animals feeding on them or if there are signs that they are in use.

Remember the map you are using is just a draft so don't worry if you make mistakes or it looks a bit messy. Make sure you put in enough information that you will understand it back in the classroom!

Follow up work:

Make a master version of the food habitat map based on the group work done during the practical session. This map should show all the areas you discovered in an easily understandable way. It doesn't need to include every detail you noted about the condition of all the features. Keep this stored separately or add another set of codes which display this if possible. For example, you could have a symbol which means broken, busy, out of bounds etc

The map should include:

- Colour coded areas which show different parts of the school and grounds, e.g. playground, garden, raised bed etc.
- Codes/symbols which identify different features, e.g. trees, birdfeeders, crops in beds, etc.
- A legend to explain colours, codes and symbols.
- The title and date the map was made.
- You could have a separate map of a classroom/kitchen/canteen or other key area
- You can take pictures or make sketches of key areas and attach to map to show how they change during the year, for example of your growing crops.

Sample Maps



Sample Questions to ask while Mapping

Choose from the list below and answer any relevant questions as you are making your food map and again towards the end of the year. Add in any additional questions that come up as you are building your food habitat map.

- How much litter from food waste was found indoors today?
- How much litter from food waste was found outdoors today?
- What kind of bins are there in the areas where food is eaten? Are there enough bins for all types of waste?
- Is there a compost bin?
 - Is it being used to put food waste?
 - Is compost being produced?
 - Is compost being used on crops in school garden?
- Was there a queue for any food/water source today? Where?
- What food is being sold in school shop/canteen etc.?
- How many raised beds, window boxes, planters are there in the school? How many are planted with food crops?
- Are there any fruit trees, bushes or other edible plants growing in school grounds? Has your class ever eaten any of the food produced by them?
- Are there wild animals feeding on wild or planted trees, shrubs or crops or on your compost heap? If so, what types of animal and what are they feeding on? Is there any evidence that they have been feeding in the past? Have you ever had to use pest control measures?

Wildlife in the Garden – some notes and questions:

- ✓ **Bees and butterflies** are great at pollinating our crops; do you have lots of **flowering plants** to feed them? If so, mark them on the map.
- ✓ **Bumblebees** work hard to pollinate our crops; to help them in particular we can **leave areas of grass to grow very long**, which can offer them a great place to shelter and nest. Again if you can identify likely suitable areas, mark them on the map.
- ✓ **Ladybirds** eat aphids and green fly, saving our crops from being nibbled away; do you have a **bug hotel** to give them shelter?
- ✓ **Frogs** are good at eating slugs, which often eat our young plants; do you have **wetland** that may provide a home for frogs?
- ✓ **Hedgehogs** too are great at eating slugs; do you have a **log pile** for shelter, and/or wild areas with **long grass** where they can go hunting?
- ✓ Many **Birds** such as thrushes and robins are great at feeding on snails and grubs and other pesky soil invertebrates that might otherwise damage our crops; Do you have a **bird table** for distributing mealworms for them? What kinds of other bird-food do you provide, if any? Is it stocked? Are there any signs of use?

Food Habitat Map – Student Answer Sheet

Q1. How many pieces of litter from food/drink sources did you find today?

Inside _____ Outside _____

Q2. What kind of bins are there in the following places?

Classroom _____ Yard _____

Q3. Is there a compost bin? _____

Is it being used? _____

Q4. What kind of food is sold in shop/vending machine/provided in school lunches?

Q5. How many raised beds/planters are there? How many are planted now? With what?

Q6. Are there any fruit bushes, trees or other edible plants growing in the grounds?

Have the class ever eaten any of them? _____

Q7. Are there any wild animals feeding, or were there signs that animals feed on:

Planted foods: _____

Wild foods: _____

Man- made sources _____