

# SCHOOL GARDEN POTPOURRI OF IDEAS

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Compiled by Amanda Vanhoozier, Gardeners in Community Development



- Make garden journals to keep throughout the year (Use a book making technique and include monthly divisions, lined, plain, and graph paper for pages. Provide time to write, draw, record, and paste up after each garden time.
- MAKE A SCARECROW! Hammer two narrow boards in a cross. Ask children to bring child size shirt, pants, shoes, mittens, and accessories. Head can be an old t-shirt stuffed and rubber banded. Read, *The Little Old Lady Who Wasn't Afraid of Anything*.
- Tuck a bulb here and there to have some early spring flowers.
- Transplant perennials. Children love the soft leaves of lamb's ear.
- Work as a community and have children choose their role in the garden.
- Before planting, have the children figure the area and read seed packets for spacing requirements. Then have them figure how many plants per area they should plant. Make seed planting templates out of laminated oaktag with holes cut for seed placement.
- Plant garlic cloves (one small section will harvest a whole by the end of school), carrots, radishes, turnips, beets, mustard greens and flower seeds recommended for fall planting. Mulch heavy with hay when small plants to withstand cool weather.
- Gather seeds from marigolds, cotton, native wildflowers, sunflowers to plant next year, or make a seed identification book, or use in a drawing or collage.
- Press flowers. Lay a sheet of cardboard on ground. Add two sheets of newspaper. Lay flowers separately and cover with two more sheets of newspaper. Keep adding layers and top off with another sheet of cardboard. Tie up with rubberbands or string and place under something heavy. Try to store pressed flowers in a cool, dry place. Wait ten days then take apart carefully.
- Dry flowers head down in 2 parts cornmeal and 1 part borax. These flowers can then be used in bird wreaths or arrangements.
- Use the garden as a multicultural study to reflect your class' ethnic backgrounds by studying plant origins and continents, plant migration, and gardening techniques from around the world.
- Make a batch of compost indoors. Recipe: 1 part dried leaves, 1 part green lawn clippings, and 1/4 part soil. Plastic line a boot box and add mix. Stir regularly and observe.
- Better yet... make a worm bin. Worms Eat My Garbage by Mary Appelhof.
- Still better yet....build a school community compost area and start composting the vegetable and fruit scraps from lunches.
- Adopt a plant and keep a journal on it (measurements, characteristics, what the class likes about it, drawings..). You may want to work with a sick plant in the school and then revive with worm castings, light and regular watering.
- Do outdoor experiments found in many teacher resource books. My favorite is to bury a nylon stuffed with natural and plastic materials. Let the children decide what goes in the bag. Dig up again in 3 months. Observe changes.
- Sing "Dirt Made My Lunch" and make a class book with cut up grocery sacks.
- Make some mud and feel it between your toes. Walk on paper and write out poem to learn with the children. Refrain: Mud is very nice to feel All squishy-squash Between the toes.

First verse: I'd rather walk in wiggly mud. Then smell a yellow rose.

Second verse: I really don't like wiggly mud. I'd rather smell a rose.

Those children singing the first verse can be those who like the feel of the mud, and those children singing the second verse can be those who would rather smell a rose.

- Expand interest in your state by researching state garden products and raise them in your garden.
- Plant the state grass or flower. Use as a springboard for art or literary project.

- Read "Growing Vegetable Soup" and try to find the vegetables in the garden. Play Vegetable Soup game like London Bridges.

We are making vegetable soup Vegetable soup, Vegetable soup, we are making vegetable soup Now put in the (vegetable of choice).

Take the \_\_\_\_\_ and stir it up, Stir it up, stir it up, Take the \_\_\_\_\_ and stir it up While making vegetable soup.

- Use the weather center. Check the temperature and graph regularly. After a rain check the rain gauge. Observe and discuss changes.
- Dance on a windy, fall day...

Little leaves fall gently down

Red and yellow and orange

Whirling, whirling, round and round

Quietly without a sound,

Falling softly to the ground.

Down, down, down and down.

- Make a note card by folding white construction paper in half. Place dried flowers on front and cover with a sheet of clear contact paper. Write a note to someone special.
- Make a book out of zip lock bags. Collect treasures outside and dictate what they are on each page.
- How Does Your Garden Grow?

Corn Stalks Grow High, way up in the sky.

(Raise arms above head and sway back and forth) Watermelons are round, (Arms in front with fingers interlocking) And grow on the ground. (Point to ground) But under the ground, (Tap ground with finger) Where no one can see. Grow potatoes and onions and carrots (Raise three fingers consecutively) All three. (Show three fingers you raised) Make a mural labeling all the vegetables and where they grow.

- Sit in the pumpkin patch. Make one by buying a sack of pie pumpkins from the farmer's market and spreading them out on the ground. Read Pumpkin, Pumpkin and The Pumpkin Blanket.
- Float picked flowers on water. Use as little boats in water way.
- Do weavings of dried grasses and wool yarn in the bottom of used seed trays from the nurseries.
- Make a wreath for birds. Use a grapevine wreath and cool glue gun on dried whole sunflowers, popcorn cobs, pinecones, and a few dried flowers to attract birds.
- Pick radishes and carrots planted in the fall. Clean off and eat like Peter Rabbit.
- Stir compost. It will steam from the heat generated by the decomposition. Sing, Zan Van's "Decomposition" song.
- Mulch root crops heavily and water before a freeze.
- Plant a cover crop of a mix of rye and Australian peas on the bare parts of garden for the winter months. The peas form rhizobia on the roots and are very interesting to investigate. They will also attract ladybugs in the spring.
- Prepare soil by turning with a shovel for the spring planting.
- Read Alison's Zinnia by Anita Lobel. It's a wonderful, alphabet book of plants from A to Z.
- The Carrot Seed is another favorite with young children. Plant some carrot seeds in egg cartons set in plastic gutter on window ledge.
- Start a yam in a plastic peanut butter jar. Change water frequently. Measure the growth of vine with flexible measuring tape. Plant in garden in spring and be prepared to have ten feet of space for it to grow. Dig yams in fall. Bake in oven until oozing with sugar. Cool and cut in circle. Yum.
- Grow some tops from any root crop.

- Make a wood chip garden. Collect rounds of trunks from Christmas tree sales. Cool glue gun on Spanish moss and small plastic animal. Poke in an air plant or succulents.
- Make a root view box by cutting a side of a milk carton. Line with overhead acetate, fill with soil, and plant seeds close to side. Cover with black paper and take off to view.
- Keep the worms happy with treats like banana peels.
- Make a plastic puppet planter. Fill a plastic puppet with soil and moisten. Poke holes in hands and plant some seeds. Name your planter and label with permanent marker.
- Expandable peat pellets are amazing. Use to start seed or propagate begonias, coleus, spider plants...
- Start something unusual in a zip lock bag. Moisten paper towel with very clean hands and slide into zip lock bag. Add 3 seeds (beans, corn, raw peanut, cotton) Transfer to garden when it warms up outside.
- Provide the birds with nesting materials. Hang a mesh bag on fence in out of way place and weave in a variety of materials (Hair from brushes, yarn, string, dried grass..). Watch these materials show up in nests.
- Follow the life cycle of a Painted Lady butterfly by raising a caterpillar. Release the butterfly in the native plant garden.
- Have a lady bug release in April. Watch for the larvae and pupa in the garden before the end of school.
- Collect soils from different spots. Put in clear plastic cups and compare texture, color, and how it absorbs water.
- Plant lettuce in any creative container. Looks great and fun to nibble.
- Pick violets and candy with sugar water. Serve on top of muffins in May for the mothers. Have a tea party in the garden.
- Make flower prints with real flowers dipped in tempera then on paper.
- Make recycle paper and add flower petals.
- Find all the wonderful books on gardens in the library.
- Act out "Little Brown Seed"

I'm a little brown seed.

Rolled up in a tiny ball.

I'll wait for the rain and sunshine.

To make me big and tall.

Older children like to make up a rap/song about worms, slugs, decomposition, and other parts of the garden ecosystem.

- Sing with Van zandt's tape, "Dirt Made My Lunch" and Mary Miche's "Earthy Tunes". These are just a collection of ideas to use around the garden. As Frederick Froebel wrote in The Education of Man in 1826, the school garden act as "budding points" for branching out in new directions of knowledge.