

STARTING A PRESCHOOL GARDEN

A MENU OF OPTIONS



Planting a garden with your preschoolers can be a fun learning experience for everyone! Gardens help children develop healthy fruit & vegetable eating habits and can increase opportunities for development of physical and social skills. Some of the best teachable moments can happen in a learning garden environment.



Plant a window sill or indoor container garden:

Advantages: Accessible, affordable, easy to maintain

Challenges: Limited light in some rooms, need regular watering, not all plants grow well inside

Tips: Use recycled materials for planting: milk jugs, yogurt cups, etc. Plant shallow rooted crops: lettuce, radishes, spinach, herbs. Be sure containers have drainage holes, and put something underneath them to catch drainage water. Plants need at least 6 hours of sunlight so put in sunny window or hang a grow



Plant a container garden:

Advantages: Affordable, easily transportable

Challenges: Needs more regular watering, dries out quickly.

Tips: 5 gallon pots and buckets work well. Use potting soil and make sure there are drainage holes! Amend your potted plants with organic fertilizer or compost every 2-3 weeks.



Plant directly in the ground:

Advantages: Affordable, requires less watering than raised beds and container gardens.

Challenges: Potential soil contamination-be sure test your soil for lead before you grow any edibles. In-ground gardens are more likely to grow weeds.

Tips: Think about creating obvious pathways so that your students know where to step. You can make your own stepping stones, or paint rocks to create a visual guide! Amend with compost. Make sure you have access to water.



Plant in raised beds:

Advantages: Defines garden space, keeps kids feet out of garden- therefore . Easier to reach in the beds. Fewer weeds.

Challenges: Needs consistent watering.

Tips: Try getting materials donated. Use fir or cedar boards, cinder blocks or other material, don't use pressure treated lumber. A 3 x 8 bed is a good size for preschoolers.



General Tips:

Watering: Water the soil, not the plant, preferably before mid-morning. Hand water with a watering can or gentle hose nozzle. Encourage preschoolers' participation with watering - try using a bucket with smaller containers for children. Sing a song that indicates how long to water a plant so that they aren't overwatered!

Seeds: Larger seeds are easier to plant. Spring: beans, peas, potatoes, radish. Summer: squash, melon, cucumbers Fall: garlic, fava beans.

Soil: Get a soil lead test: <http://growing-gardens.org/portland-gardening-resources/books-and-links/> has more information. Try using a blended soil, and add compost to your garden to add nutrients.

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TIPS, CHALLENGES, RESOURCES



TIPS FOR A REGISTERED FAMILY OR IN-HOME CARE CENTER:

- Start small! Plant a few things at a time. Try engaging kids first with window sill planting or a worm bin.
- Engage your families! Create a routine for regular maintenance and have clear roles for parents to get involved regularly. For example, you could have Wednesday Waters or Monday Maintainers...
- Connect your snacks with what you are growing in the garden. Link the planting, growing and harvesting activities with stories, movement and social skill building.

TIPS FOR AN EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER:

- Think about ways to incorporate parent involvement through pre-existing parent structures (e.g. parent councils). See if there are experts among parents, and offer learning opportunities about gardening for parents who haven't gardened yet.
- Make sure you have clear communication with teachers, administrators, and approval from board and property management before making any building plans. Having support is key when starting a new garden at an early childhood center!

COMMON CHALLENGES, AND SUGGESTIONS:

- There is **no single way** to start a preschool garden. Try asking your families, teachers, and administrators to see which type of garden will work best for your preschool environment. If you have community involvement, try creating a Garden Committee to develop a Master Plan to identify your vision, goals, maintenance plans and potential stakeholders.
- **Maintenance** can be particularly challenging over the summer, but can also be a great opportunity to engage families to learn about growing food.
- Consistent **funding** is a challenge. Be resourceful, think of community partnerships to leverage for donations, discounts, volunteers, and other support!
- Which **curriculum** is the best? There is a lot of curriculum out there, try to treat your preschool garden program as an experiment and learn with the children! Gardens can be unpredictable; plants might not grow and that's okay! Your preschoolers will love the learning opportunity!



RESOURCES:

* **Curriculum:** <http://growing-minds.org/tag/preschool+lesson-plan/>

<http://www.farmtopreschool.org/curricula.html>

* **Resources:** <http://www.farmtopreschool.org/>

<http://www.growing-gardens.org/>



GROWING GARDENS