

My First Garden

Rodale Institute's Guide to teaching children where their food comes from and starting a school garden

Lesson 3: Planting the garden

Objective 1: Children will explore the soil with tools, should understand how to move carefully and respectfully through the garden using pathways, and understand the difference between where to walk and where plants grow.

Objective 2: Children will learn to be mindful and use delicate actions to plant baby seedlings.

Materials: Raised beds, containers, other planting space; compost/soil; trowels, rakes, shovels, wheel barrow, stepping stones, watering cans/hose, labels, row cover (for frost), stakes and twine (for beans or tomatoes). Use tools that are the appropriate size for the students.

Activities:

1. **Preparing the garden:** Raised beds should be built, or containers set in place, ahead of time. They should also be at least $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ full of soil before involving the class. Otherwise, this step could take several days before ready to plant. Children can help fill the last bit of soil into the beds, to feel connected to this part of the process, but too much heavy lifting will likely tire them out. Use small wheel barrows or small buckets that are an appropriate size for them.

Children can also use rakes and trowels to explore the soil and prepare the surface for planting.

2. **Follow the leader:** Walk around the pathways so children understand the appropriate place to walk and where plants need space to grow. Make it into a fun game doing different types of walks and movements. This circuit should be repeated enough times that the children do not have to think about where they should and should not walk.
3. ***Transplanting the garden:** Each child will plant a seedling with help from an adult who will remove it from its container.

Children will dig a hole about two times the size of the container holding the roots of the plant. They will use a watering can or hose to fill up the hole with water.

An adult will then remove the plant from the container. New seedlings are very delicate; the best strategy is to grasp the plant firmly from the thick part of the stem as close as possible to the soil level. With the other hand, tip the container so it is sideways or upside down. It may help to squeeze the container a little to loosen the roots and remove the whole plant. You want to make sure that the majority of the roots are intact when removing. It is ok to plant the whole soil block into the hole. Place the seedling in the hole. The child will then cover up the roots with the surrounding soil. Transfer the popsicle stick label into the garden with the plant.

*It is helpful to have some backup transplant resources in case there are any growth issues with classroom plants.

4. **Rock on! Labels for the garden.** Painting rocks to label garden plants with words or pictures. Collect some palm-sized rocks. Paint them white or another solid color and allow them to dry overnight. Then decorate them using colorful paint or crayons with pictures of veggies or words that describe the crop planted. Let dry overnight if necessary, then set into the garden.

Materials: Several palm-sized rocks, acrylic paint, paint brushes, crayons.

5. **Mulching:** Use straw, dried leaves or grass clippings to spread around the garden to protect plants and keep weeds out.

Materials: Straw, dried leaves, or grass clippings; gloves, rakes.

6. **Protecting Plants:** Depending on your site, you may need to protect your garden from wildlife such as birds, groundhogs, rabbits, or deer. Birdnetting can be very effective for this job. Pin the netting at the edge of the bed and over the seedlings using ground staples. It may be necessary to use many layers depending on the type of pest pressure you are experiencing.

Read: Two Little Gardeners by Margaret Wise Brown

Taste: Veggie pockets with local organic cheese (perfect use for sprouts!) Or organic apples and honey.

Sample Recipe: Veggie Pockets

This recipe is simple and very flexible! It is fun to have the children build their own (with some help, of course!)

Ingredients:

- Pita pocket bread cut into small triangles for tasting.
- Cheese: cream cheese or sliced cheese work equally well.
- Selection of veggies: sprouts, sliced cucumbers, chopped lettuce or raw spinach, shredded carrots, diced peppers, halved cherry tomatoes, etc.

Arrange all ingredients on separate plates to create a Make-Your-Own Veggie Pocket buffet. If using cream cheese this could also be pre-spread on the pitas for ease.

Children choose their ingredients and build their pockets on their plates!

Tips for success:

- Assign a teacher or parent to coordinate ongoing maintenance like daily watering and weeding.
- Make a small list of rules that children need to follow when participating and visiting the garden. View our sample Safety Tips and Safety Contract.
- Children should continue working on their plant journals and record their observations in drawings or notes.

Complete Materials Guide

Note that books can also be borrowed from the library to cut costs and that prices are estimations and may vary depending upon region.

Lesson 3: Planting the garden:

Options:

- **Build raised beds**
- **Use oversized containers**

Material	Quantity	Source	Approx. cost*
Raised Bed: 4' x 8' bed	1		
Wood (NOT PRESSURE TREATED)	3 @ 2" x 8" x 8'	Lowe's/Home Depot/Hardware store	\$24.00 - \$30.00
Fasteners: 3" – 3.5" wood deck screws	0.5 – 1 lb. box	Lowe's/Home Depot/ Hardware	\$7.00 - \$12.00
Drill			
OR			
Oversized containers	1 - 3	Lowe's/Home Depot/Garden Center	\$15.00 - \$50.00
Compost/Soil	1 – 3 yards; Dependent upon size of planting space	Garden Center; Many municipalities have free compost available at recycling centers	\$0 - \$100.00
Tools: Trowels, shovels, rakes,	5 – 8 trowels; 2-3 shovels; 2-3 rakes	Garden Center/Lowe's/Walmart	\$50.00 - \$75.00
Wheel barrow	1	Garden Center/Lowe's/Walmart	\$20.00 - \$30.00
Hose/Watering Cans	1/several	Garden Center/Lowe's/ Walmart	\$15.00 -40.00

Row Cover (frost protection)	10' x 50'	Johnny's Selected Seeds	\$35.00
Ground Staples (for row cover)	1 pack of 50	Lowe's/Garden Center	\$10.00 - \$15.00
Acrylic Paint (for rocks) & brushes	Several colors	Walmart/Target/Craft Store	\$10.00 - \$15.00
Book: <i>Two Little Gardeners</i>	1	Amazon	\$3.00 - \$6.00
Veggie pocket snack	See recipe	Grocery Store	\$15.00 - \$20.00