



# Growing units for teachers

## Our basic recipe for brilliant lessons on the plot

### Key ingredients

#### Decide on numbers

Ideally, the adult-to-child ratio for most gardening activities should be no more than 1:10. If you have a larger group, try to boost the number of adults and plan a carousel of activities.

Can you recruit volunteer helpers among the wider school staff, parents or the local community? While it's possible to manage larger groups on your own, it typically impacts on the quality of learning.

#### Recruit the children

Are you aiming for a whole-school approach or a smaller group? Are you mixing up the ages or sticking to one age range? One strategy for a whole-school approach is to divide each class into smaller groups and rotate them each week. It's important to try to work with the same children for a full growing season. This is so that they can experience the change in the seasons, observe the life cycles of plants, and taste the fruits of their labour.

#### If you lack confidence... don't worry!

These resources will help you to structure your work outside. They are specifically designed to make your life easier and cut preparation and planning time to a minimum.

Gardening is not difficult if you keep it simple. If you are unsure of any specific details, let Google be your guide. There's tons of useful information and how-to-videos on the internet. Solicit help from keen local gardeners – there are often parents or grandparents who would love to get involved.

If you are a beginner, perhaps start by growing a small variety of the most straightforward crops. For example, you could try the following from seed, and buy in some potted herbs and tomatoes:

Lettuce: [www.rhs.org.uk/advice/grow-your-own/vegetables/lettuce](http://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/grow-your-own/vegetables/lettuce)

Spinach: [www.rhs.org.uk/advice/grow-your-own/vegetables/spinach](http://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/grow-your-own/vegetables/spinach)

Peas: [www.rhs.org.uk/advice/grow-your-own/vegetables/peas](http://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/grow-your-own/vegetables/peas)

Nasturtiums: [www.rhs.org.uk/education-learning/gardening-children-schools/family-activities/Grow-it-!/grow/nasturtium](http://www.rhs.org.uk/education-learning/gardening-children-schools/family-activities/Grow-it-!/grow/nasturtium)

Runner beans: [www.rhs.org.uk/advice/grow-your-own/vegetables/runner-beans](http://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/grow-your-own/vegetables/runner-beans)

Courgettes: [www.rhs.org.uk/advice/grow-your-own/vegetables/courgettes](http://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/grow-your-own/vegetables/courgettes)

Don't forget to set up a watering rota, too. Children love watering plants, so a simple rota system will keep them happy and make sure everyone gets a fair turn.

#### Aim for an organic plot

You want a chemical-free garden where you can demonstrate key principles such as recycling, making compost, seed saving and harvesting rainwater. Operate a 'no-kill' policy for slugs, snails and other insects, teaching children which are 'friends' or 'foes'.

#### Record what you do outside

Set up a simple system with the children, such as keeping a garden diary or blog to note successes and failures, yields, nagging questions, trials and tests and other relevant detail. Take plenty of photos of events and activities on the plot. This could be a good opportunity to weave ICT into your project, for example, by children using a tablet device to record and store this information.

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A collection of weekly photos will prove highly useful for reminding children of previous work and progress, especially with younger children. Scrolling through images of a season is an invaluable teaching tool and record of the year.

## Publicise your project

On the plot, it's easy to feel cut off from the rest of the school. Find ways to communicate your work. For example, establish a regular short slot in a whole-school assembly for updates. Pin up photos on noticeboards for staff and parents. Leave any surplus produce in the staffroom for other teachers – these strategies may also help to recruit volunteers.

## Expect the unexpected

Gardening has a habit of springing the occasional surprise. You may find your lettuces demolished overnight by slugs and snails. A freak sunny weekend may parch your seedlings. Roll with it – gardening teaches us to be flexible, patient and take surprises in our stride. These are useful life skills.

## Before each session

- ★ Have a quick look around. What needs to be done? Make a to-do list. Separate these tasks into those that the children can help with and others that are realistically best left to yourself or other adults.
- ★ Assess any possible risks in your planned activities. Note if any pupils have any relevant allergies or other needs.
- ★ Use these resources to identify a key theme and objective for the session. What are the key concepts and skills you want the children to learn? Choose one or two key criteria to assess the children's progress against. What is the key vocabulary you want them to use? Write the words down as a visual teaching aid for the sessions. Keep planning simple and manageable. Decide on your main activity and then weave in other garden tasks as necessary.

## Running a session

- ★ Register or count the number of children in the group. It's easy to lose track when moving around outside.
- ★ Welcome the children and remind them of any rules for moving around the space ("Always walk") and handling plants or tools ("Hold trowels and forks facing downwards"). Build in time to tidy up at the end of the session.
- ★ Start with a warm-up – get the children active and interacting with the plants. It's vital for children learn the plant names. Play games such as challenging them to find the radishes/ strawberries and so on. Or ask them to 'Show me your favourite plant and then explain your reasons why'. Always model the activity first.
- ★ Ask the children what season and/or month it is. Chant the sequence together to reinforce their names and sequence. Observe how the weather is changing and discuss the implications for your plot. Note the temperature and compare to previous sessions – a simple weather chart is a useful feature on any school plot.
- ★ Invite the children to look around the garden and suggest tasks that need to be done. Add them to your own to-do list. Aim to empower the children with the observational skills needed to become great gardeners.

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- ★ Recap on prior learning – get the children thinking about previous sessions on the plot before you explain what you will be learning today.
- ★ Embrace the multi-sensory aspects of working outdoors. Don't be afraid to stop to listen to birdsong, for example, or enjoy the sensation of sunshine on your cheeks.
- ★ Grab every opportunity to extend the children's language: chant new words and names; urge them to describe sensory experiences; use talk partners; don't be shy of introducing technical and horticultural vocabulary. Even the youngest children can quickly learn unfamiliar words with a bit of practise.
- ★ Eat, eat, eat! Graze as you garden and grab any opportunity to model simple no-cook recipes such as mixing up an impromptu salad. We want to develop healthy eating habits from the earliest age possible. Make a ritual of sharing any harvests together, for example, by always sitting in a circle.

## Our pick for the plot

Here are some plants that your children will definitely enjoy:

**Classics** ↻

- Beans
- Blueberries
- Carrots
- Cherry tomatoes
- Chives
- Courgettes
- Lavender
- Mint
- Mangetout/  
sugar snap peas
- Rosemary
- Salads of all  
kinds
- Strawberries
- Sunflowers
- Thyme

**Have you tried?** ↻

- Coriander
- Cosmos
- Dill
- Lemon Verbena
- Mouse melons
- Nasturtiums
- Sorrel