2: Summer Growth

Spending time outside under the bright blue sky and shining sun, or amongst the green grass, swaying trees, and vibrant flowers is part of the summer season! Gardening may be a dirty activity filled with soil and little critters such as worms and salamanders, but this practice can be extremely beneficial and rewarding. Starting your own garden can engage all five senses; encourage home-grown and healthy eating; teach lessons of responsibility, care, and organization; and create environmental awareness. Gardens come in all shapes and sizes, and can be filled with a variety of goods — vegetables, fruits, herbs, or various blooming flowers. This activity promotes the idea of summer growth through gardening; a simple container garden makes a great first garden project, and all you need is something that can hold soil with small holes in the bottom for excess water to drain. Following a process to start your own garden, and then remembering to take care of your garden as you watch it grow shall yield exciting results with wonderful plants!

Reading Recommendations:

Children

1. *Flowers and Trees* by Nancy Carlson
2. *Harriet and the Garden* by Nancy Carlson
3. *Everyday Garden* by Cynthia Rylant
4. *Planting the Wild Garden* by Kathryn Galbraith
5. *Top and Pippo in the Garden* by Helen Oxenbury
7. *The Tiny Seed* by Eric Carle
8. *We are the Gardeners* by Joanna Gaines and Kids

Juniors

1. *My own Herb Garden* by Allan Swenson
2. *Gardening without Soil* by Sarah Riedman
3. *You Can Grow Tomatoes* by Julie Wanhala
4. *The Plant Cycle* by Nina Morgan
5. *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett
6. *the World of Plants* by David Bellamy

**Teens**
1. *The Bizarre and Incredible World of Plants* by Wolfgang Stuppy
2. *Wondrous World of Seedless Plants* by William C. Grimm
3. *The Botany of Desire* by Michael Pollan
4. *Flowering Plants* by Mick P. Richardson
5. *The Secret Wisdom of Nature* by Peter Wohlleben
7. *Up in the Garden and Down in the Dirt* by Kate Messner
8. *The Container Garden Encyclopedia*

**Activity:**

**Materials**
- container (the type of container is up to you… you can make a container garden from any object that holds soil and has drainage holes or can easily be drilled into to create drainage holes; consider these options: an empty egg carton is perfect for starting multiple seedlings; a 3-5 gallon bucket, recycled plastic bottle, milk jug, or juice carton also work as small and transportable gardens; or use a ceramic pot)
- potting soil (you will want to use a well-draining potting mix that absorbs water but also drains well)
- seeds (the seeds are also up to you… depending on what you want to grow your seeds could be a specific kind of vegetable, fruit, or a favorite flower)
- gardening gloves

**Procedure**
With your seeds and container picked out, it’s time to start planting! Note: always use gloves when gardening, and make sure to wash your hands after touching any soil or plants.

1. Make sure your container has holes already drilled into the bottom, to allow for proper drainage. If your container does not already have holes you can simply drill or poke 2-7 holes in the bottom of the container. The smaller the container the less holes it will need.
2. Moisten your soil before placing it in your bucket. To make sure your soil mix is evenly moist, it is best to slowly add water and mix it thoroughly before placing it in the bucket. If you do not do this ahead of time, you may end up with pockets of soil that stay dry and will have more settling of the soil over time.
3. Place your soil in the container and plant. Add soil to about 1 inch below the rim then follow the directions listed on the seed packet. Planting seeds typically means creating little pockets or holes in the soil in the container, these holes should be about 1/4 - 1/2 inch deep and act as little pockets to hold your seeds. All remember to leave enough room around each seed so that air can circulate freely; crowded plants are more susceptible to disease and pest infestations.
4. Once the seeds have been added to the container, lightly cover them with additional soil. You do not want to over-cover the seeds because this will prevent the seeds from
getting the sunlight, water, and other nutrients they need to start sprouting and growing.

5. With your seeds finally planted it is time to gently water your new garden until water begins to drain from the bottom.

6. Place your containers in a spot to match your plants’ sunlight needs. Look on the back of the seed packet to determine the amount of sun your plants require to grow (ie: full sun, part sun, shade…) and then place your container in a location either outside or inside by a windowsill that matches your seeds sunlight needs.

7. The process isn’t over yet… gardening requires daily attention! Check on your container garden daily and look for changes and growth. Monitor to determine watering needs. The best way to determine when your new container garden needs water is to put your finger in the soil and check to see if it is dry. Also keep an eye out for pest problems!

8. Over the summer your seeds should mature into wonderful plants for you to enjoy!

Dive Deeper:
After reading and/or completing the activity, does this topic peak your interest?

Check out these websites to further explore the topic of gardening:
1. Kids Gardening — [https://kidsgardening.org](https://kidsgardening.org)
5. Gardening Tips — [https://www.countryliving.com/gardening/](https://www.countryliving.com/gardening/)

Check out these videos and films to visually learn more:
1. Garden Hacks You’ll Want to Know — [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jD8n2CKEWtA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jD8n2CKEWtA)
3. How Plants Communicate & Think (BBC Documentary)
5. In the Mind of Plants (Documentary Film)

To stimulate the brain and engage in active learning, ask these questions:

Looking to build upon writing skills? Share your responses to these questions in a personal journal or brief paragraph essay.
Looking to build upon verbal communication and discussion based skills? Share your responses around the dinner table at night with family members; each person can contribute to the conversation with their own perspectives.
Looking to visually demonstrate your ideas? Share your responses by drawing and labeling a diagram, creating a storyboard with pictures, construct a 3D model, or acting out a scene.

1. What are the benefits of gardening?

2. How is gardening different around the world; do you think gardening is the same or different based on geographical locations? What are some factors that might make grading different around the world? Think about various climates and weather patterns; amount of sunlight or local temperatures. all over the world?

3. What types of plants, vegetables, fruits, shrubs, and other elements might you add to your dream garden; will you add waterfalls, ponds, stepping stones, or benches? Think about the layout of your dream garden as well as the size.