

Sensory Gardens for Special Education Students

Sensory garden benefits may include:

- Improves fine and gross motor skills
- Encourages communication and social skills
- Increases self-esteem
- Promotes responsibility
- Stimulates sensory awareness
- Enhances creativity
- Promotes “hands-on” and “multi-sensory” learning
- Helps reduce stress, anxiety, and frustration
- Helps reduce aggressive behaviors
- Can help enhance and support concepts taught in the classroom
- Adapts to many types of curriculum
- Provides opportunities for investigative learning
- Provides a non-threatening environment
- Creates common ground between students

Tips for your sensory garden:

- Make safety your top priority
- Make sure the garden is accessible and inclusive to all students
- Use tools suited to children or specially adapted tools for children with special needs
- Plan garden related activities often, but for short time periods
- Use plants that are durable and easy to grow
- Let your students participate as much as possible
- Design your garden to meet your student’s needs.
- Keep safety in mind
- Provide plenty of adult helpers
- Have plenty of fluids and sun protection available
- Partner special education students with mainstream students
- Allow time for children to adjust to the sights and smells of the garden
- Balance jobs that have instant results, such as weeding and harvesting; with jobs that have longer term results, such as transplanting or sowing seeds.
- Demonstrate gardening tasks for the students before they leave the classroom and once they are in the garden

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Curriculum connections:

MATH

- *How fast does dill grow? – Measure and graph the growth rates of dill plants, make size comparisons
- *When will a seed germinate? – Use seed catalog/seed packet information and math to predict when a seed will germinate and how long it will take to mature, predict when a seed would need to be planted in order to be ready for a chosen holiday.
- *Compare the sizes of herb seeds?
- *Observe and record the air and soil temperatures in your class herb garden?
- *Calculate the weight and volume of soil when it is wet and when it is dry.
- *Calculate how many sage plants will fit into a 6 ft. x 6 ft. garden
- *Use plants to help you learn about taking measurements
- *Learn about fractions by using herbs for cooking

SCIENCE

- *Dead or alive? – use basil plants to compare the difference between living and non-living things
- *What is pH? – How does pH affect the smell and taste of basil, sage, and oregano
- *What happens if I water thyme plants with soda or tomato juice?
- *Why do herbs smell? – investigate what parts of herb plants cause them to smell
- *Plant identification – press and label various herb plants, draw and diagram the parts of a leaf
- *Plant life cycles – plant seeds and learn about reproductive life cycles as they grow

WRITING/LANGUAGE ARTS

- *What role have herbs played in the development of modern day medicine? – have the students interview a pharmacist or doctor about the role herbs have played in the developing of medicine, have them write a written report or give an oral report to share what they have learned.
- *Compare and contrast the facts and fiction about various herb plants.
- *Write a description of the plants growing in your garden
- *Write a letter to your local extension service or botanic garden asking a “plant-related” question?
- *Learn to use the library or internet by researching a certain type of herb or plant

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HEALTH

- *What role can herbs play in healthy eating?
- *Can herbs be used to spice up vegetable dishes?
- *Use herbs to learn about how to harvest and preserve food?
- *Learn about cooking with herbs
- *Learn about the role herbs have played in the development of medicine?

SOCIAL STUDIES

- *What role have herbs played in different cultures?
- *How are herbs used around the world?
- *What role have spices played in ancient civilizations?
- *Do herbs have economic uses? – examine the ingredient labels of various household products to determine if herbs are listed in the ingredients, visit the grocery store and look for products that use herbs

CULTURAL ARTS – music, art, drama

- *Paint or draw various herbs and plants
- *Perform a play that depicts the life cycle of a sunflower or other plants
- *Does Basil like Beethoven? – learn how music affects plant behavior and growth
- *Make or decorate clay pots for a school plant sale
- *Develop advertising skills by designing marketing materials and plant labels for a school plant sale.
- *Write the lyrics for songs that teach about the parts of a plant or the life cycle of a plant. Perform the songs for your school.
- *Decorate rain barrels for a school plant sale or for use by your school.

Contact Information

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