Spring Unit

Planting the Garden

MARCH – Sun, Soil and Seeds
APRIL – Tools
MAY – Dig In
Spring Unit  

Circle-Time Activities Menu

“Planting the Garden”

March Theme

“Sun, Soil and Seeds”

Week 1:  
Why is gardening outdoors different from gardening indoors?  
What can we plant in March?  (Radishes, potatoes, rhubarb)  
Why is the sun important for plants to grow?  
Vegetable tasting  
Read “The Sun: Our Nearest Star” by Franklyn M. Branley and Edward Miller

Week 2:  
What do we know about gardens?  What do we want to know about gardens?  
What are the parts of a seed?  
How many different shapes, sizes, and textures of seeds are there?  
Vegetable tasting  
Read “A Seed is Sleepy!” by Dianna Hutts Aston

Week 3:  
Why is soil important?  Is it necessary for plant growth?  
Do you have a garden at home?  Do you want to start a garden at home?  
What types of soil are there?  What is the best type of soil?  
Vegetable tasting  
Read “Dirt: The Scoop on Soil” by Rosinsky

Week 4:  
How do we transplant our indoor sprouts outdoors?  
What vegetables are we going to grow in our garden?  
Who is going to help with what part of the garden?  
What was your favorite thing we did indoors?  
What was your least favorite?  
Vegetable tasting  
Read “The Vegetables We Eat” by Gail Gibbons
March “Sun, Soil and Seeds”

Background for Teachers
During the month of March, you will begin to introduce the children to the process of creating the outdoor garden. You may have done some planting last month but now it’s the time to really make the most of those outdoor gardening times. Have the children help with all aspects of the garden and make sure you have enough child-sized tools for them all. Now is also a good time to get the families and community involved. Put information in your local paper about your garden project and see if you can solicit family or neighborhood volunteers!

Monthly Goals
Your goals are going to be to inspire curiosity in the children. The weather will begin to warm towards the end of the month and it is important to show the children that the outdoor garden is a work in progress and not something that will yield immediate results. Your job is to inspire a love of learning and a love of gardening!

What to PLANT this Month
Good things to plant this month are radishes, potatoes, and rhubarb. See the planting guide on page x for tips.
Dear Family,

This month’s theme is “Sun, Soil and Seeds” and is the first theme in our Spring Unit, “Planting the Garden.” We are really getting our garden project going and could use your help! If you’d like to volunteer any of your time to come in and help us till soil, plant seeds, or water plants, please let us know!

Your child is going to be learning about what plants need to grow and produce something that we can eat! We will be talking about the importance of sunlight, soil, and seeds and how they are all interconnected and part of the growing process. Please help us connect the concepts for the kids by asking your child what he or she learned each day when you get home.

Happy Growing!

Your Child’s Teacher

At home CONNECTION
These days, many children are spending an unprecedented amount of time with electronics, and less time with traditional creative discovery, such as crafts, role-playing and exploring the outdoors. Inspire your children and encourage them to get outside and get messy! Children learn by touching, tasting, smelling, and asking questions. Always encourage this unbridled curiosity for the natural world!

Even if you’re not experienced with gardening and have no “green thumb” at all, it is important for you to get involved with your children. Remember to always be a life-long learner with your child!
Seed Sorting

Materials List:
• A variety of seeds
• Trays for sorting

Purpose:
To encourage the children to sort different seeds by shape, size, color, or texture.

Instructions:
Place the seeds and trays in the block center and encourage the children to sort them.

What they learn:
This activity will work fine motor skills, and build cognitive skills as the children sort based on different characteristics of the seeds.
Seed Art

Materials List:
• A variety of seeds
• Glue
• Paper

Purpose:
To use seeds in creating artwork!

Instructions:
Place materials in the art center and encourage the children to glue seeds onto paper in anyway they choose. Label the pictures with the child’s name and display them in the classroom.

What they learn:
The more the children handle seeds the more opportunity there will be for you to engage in conversations with them about what comes from a seed!
Mud Pies
(adapted from “Kids Garden”)

Materials List:
• Soil from the outdoor garden area
• Pie tins

Purpose:
To grow a great garden, it is important to find out what kind of soil you are dealing with!

Instructions:
Encourage the children to gather a handful of soil and work it with their hands. You may want to add a small amount of water to the soil. Allow them to fill the pie tins with the soil and make “pies.” Talk with them about the texture of the soil. If the soil is heavy and sticky it has clay in it. If it falls apart then it is sandy. If the soil is dark brown and keeps its basic shape but is slightly loose and crumbly, the soil is loam and is the best kind of soil for gardening!

What they learn:
Discovering whether the soil you’ll be dealing with is “loam” or not is an important gardening skill!
Materials List:
- Seed parts poster
- A variety of seeds

Purpose:
As the planting season grows nearer and nearer, it will be important for the children to understand what seeds are and what makes a seed!

Instructions:
Copy the diagram and display it in the science area. Allow the children to look at it and talk open-endedly with them about what they see. Encourage them to compare the seeds in the classroom with the poster. Ask them things like “why does a seed need a food storage area?” or “where does the plant come out?”

What they learn:
By observing the natural world visually through a poster and then in a hands on way, by manipulating the seeds you provide, the children will begin to make connections and develop an understanding of the concepts much faster!
Seed Packet Shakers

Materials List:
• A variety of seeds in sealed packages (or you can make your own shakers with seeds and empty containers!)

Purpose:
To discover the noise that seeds make when you shake them!

Instructions:
Encourage the children to make beats and rhythms using the seed packets. Talk with them about the different sounds they are making and which ones they like best. If you want, you can add different instruments to the mix and make lots of sound combinations!

What they learn:
Sometimes just making “noise” is a very relaxing activity for young children!
Materials List:
- A variety of shapes and sizes of seeds
- Plastic tweezers
- Small containers or egg carton

Purpose:
To exercise the children’s fine motor skills!

Instructions:
Place the seeds, tweezers, and sorting containers in the blocks area.
Supervise children as they use the tweezers to pick up the small seeds and fill the containers or egg cartons.

What they learn:
This activity will likely challenge most of the children to really work their fine motor skills!
Dirt Art

Materials List:
• Dirt from outside
• Small amount of water
• Paper

Purpose:
To use dirt as a painting medium!

Instructions:
Encourage children to mix a small amount of water in the dirt and then “paint” with the mixture onto the paper. Use close supervision, as this activity will get messy fast!

What they learn:
Allowing the children to gather the dirt and mix it with the water provides all sorts of sensory experiences and opportunities for learning about textures and properties of both dirt and water.
Materials List:
- A variety of edible seeds (sunflower seeds, pumpkin or squash seeds, pine nuts, sesame seeds, pomegranate seeds, etc.)

Purpose:
To show children that many seeds can be eaten!

Instructions:
You may want to ask your families to contribute to the snack party by bringing in a few different items that are edible. (Another other idea is granola bars that are “seedy”) Encourage the children to try to identify the seeds as they taste them. Talk with them about the tastes and textures of the seeds they try! Did you know that seeds are very healthy and they contain large amounts of vitamins, minerals, proteins, essential oils and dormant enzymes? Eat up!

What they learn:
Often, children don't realize where their food comes from. This activity is an opportunity for children to identify different seeds that can be eaten and also used for planting!
Materials List:
- Soil parts poster
- Chart paper
- Marker

Purpose:
To revisit the activity from week one and discuss the type of soil that you have in your outdoor garden.

Instructions:
Copy the diagram and display it in the science area. Talk with the children about the different components to soil and the different layers. Ask them what they know about soil and what they want to know, and record these items in columns on the chart paper. Make it a point to find out the answers to what you don’t know yet, by digging around in the garden!

What they learn:
Well, did you know that garden soil has some real important parts: minerals, organic matter (rotting plant and animal parts), air spaces and water? If these things are not in the right balance you might have soil that is too clay, too sandy, too dry, too wet, or too hard.
**Materials List:**
- Streamers or crepe paper (yellows, oranges, reds)
- Dowel rods or sticks
- Tape

**Purpose:**
To create dancing streamers to go dance out in the sunshine!

**Instructions:**
Tell the children that you are going to spend some time in the sun today and that you are going to create some streamers to use for dancing in the sunshine! Allow them to choose the colors and lengths of streamers and tape them to the end of the dowel rod or stick. Label each stick with the child’s name and encourage them to dance and wave their streamers outside in the garden, under the sunshine!

**What they learn:**
Movement is a powerful tool to get children involved and this activity is a great way to get them moving and play cooperatively!
How Many Hands?

Materials List:
- Tape measures
- Pencils and other classroom objects that are standard lengths (example, an unsharpened pencil is approx. 9 inches long)
- Chart paper
- Marker

Purpose:
When planting the garden, distance between the seedlings will be a very important consideration.

Instructions:
Determine with the children the length of different objects found in the classroom. Also, determine the length of the average child’s hand and also of an adult hand. Write down the object and the length next to it on the chart paper and display it in the classroom. Talk with the children about why creating distance between the small seedlings is important and how you will be able to easily measure how far to space your seeds (example, two pencils, 6 child hands, 4 child foot prints, etc.)

What they learn:
Young children don’t have the cognitive ability to fully comprehend measurement using standard tools (measuring tapes, rulers, etc.) but they will easily understand objects that have standard and recognizable lengths!
Sand Art

Materials List:
- Sand
- Glue
- Paper

Purpose:
To discover the texture of sand as opposed to soil.

Instructions:
Place the materials in the art area and encourage the children to create art using the sand. Label the creations with their names and allow them to dry before displaying them in the classroom.

What they learn:
Exploring textures is a valuable sensory experience. Also, taking the opportunity to talk with the children about sand and where they might find it will encourage them to think about areas of the world other than the one they live in. What types of plants grow in sandy areas? You could even show pictures of dessert plants or plants found growing near the ocean to connect the concepts to the natural world.
Seed Beds

Materials List:
- Pictures of garden “beds”
- Chart paper
- Marker

Purpose:
To get the children thinking about where their seeds “live” and what needs they have that are similar to those of people!

Instructions:
Show the children the photographs of the garden beds. Ask them what they know about beds and what they want to know. Write these things down on the chart paper. Explain to them that a “bed” for a seed is made up of soil that is mounded up around it that keep the seeds warm and safe for growing! Allow the children to experiment with raising the dirt around the seeds this week when you work in the garden!

What they learn:
By asking what the children already know and what they’d like to know, you are encouraging scientific questioning. When children discover answers to their questions through experiences, they are more likely to remember the information because it was learned in a hands-on way!
Seed Tapes

Materials List:
• Paper
• Flour
• Water
• Paintbrushes
• Seeds
• Scissors (teachers only)

Purpose:
Seed tapes are a great way to pre-measure your planting distance!

Instructions:
Cut plain paper, such as copy paper or newspaper, into long one-inch wide strips. With the children's help, make glue by mixing the flour and water to the consistency of gravy. With the brush, help the children pick up a small dot of glue, then touch the brush to a seed, and place the seed with the adhering glue on the paper. Continue this process spacing the seeds according to the directions on the seed package. After the tapes have air dried on a flat surface, roll or fold them up and store in a plastic sandwich type baggie. Be sure to date and label the baggie. When it is time to plant, just unroll, lay it on the soil surface, cover with a thin layer of soil, and water!

What they learn:
This is a method that gardeners sometimes use to gauge the spacing of their seeds. It is ideal for plants like carrots, beets, and lettuce!
Spring Unit “Planting the Garden”
March Week 3
“Sun, Soil and Seeds”
Music and Movement

I’m a Little Seed

Materials List:
• Chart paper
• Marker

Purpose:
To celebrate seeds!

Instructions:
Copy the words to the poem on the chart paper and display it in the classroom.

What they learn:
Understanding that all plants start from seeds and all vegetable start from plants is a very large concept for young children. Through songs and rhymes, you help make the concepts easier for the children to understand.

I’m a Little Seed
(to the tune of “I’m a Little Teapot”)

I’m a little seed,

Brown and fat,

I haven’t got a front,

And I haven’t got a back.

Plant me in the earth,

Give me water each day,

I’ll grow to be a yummy snack,

While you play!

Snack Attack!
Remember to introduce a new raw vegetable for tasting this week!
Weight of Dirt

Materials List:
- Kitchen scale or child sized balance scale
- Dirt from the outdoor garden
- Water
- Chart paper
- Marker
- A variety of items found in your classroom

Purpose:
To understand the concept of weight as a unit of measurement.

Instructions:
Talk with the children about weight and how to use the scale to measure how much something weighs. Allow the children to choose some items from the classroom to weigh and then weigh the soil. Which weighs more? Which way did the balance scale lean? Write down your observations on the chart paper and display it in the classroom. You can also weigh different amounts of dirt, or dirt with water added versus dirt that is dry.

What they learn:
The children will likely stay interested in this activity for a while and you might run out to things to measure and weigh! They love comparing things and it encourages inquiry and curiosity, which are valuable skills.
Make a Seed Book

Materials List:
- Construction paper
- Seeds
- Glue
- Contact paper or laminating paper
- Hole punch
- Yarn
- Marker

Purpose:
To create a book of seeds for the children to explore.

Instructions:
Encourage the children to stick the seeds to the paper with the glue. Allow them to glue them on however they choose, but encourage them to sort them by size, color, or type. Label the pages as they dictate their thoughts and ideas to you. When they are done with the gluing, cover the pages with contact paper or laminating paper, hole punch them, and tie yarn through the holes to create a book! Each child can make his or her own book or can make a page in a larger class book. Put the book(s) in the library area for future use.

What they learn:
Creating their own books is a great way to encourage literacy and language development in your classroom.
Materials List:
- Pictures of vegetable plants that grow best in shade (basil, spinach, lettuce, beets)
- Pictures of vegetable plants that grow best in sun (tomatoes, peppers, squash)
- Chart paper
- Tape

Purpose:
To plan a successful garden, it is important to know what types of plants prefer what types of “homes.”

Instructions:
Tell the children that you are going to pick the best home for the plants in your garden. Talk with them about shade and sun and why some plants prefer cooler, shadier areas and some prefer direct sunlight. Show them the pictures and talk to them about what plant prefers what. Then, create two columns on the chart paper and allow the children to stick the pictures of the plants where they best fit (shade or sun). Don’t worry if they don’t get them correct; remember it’s a learning process!

What they learn:
If you leave this chart up throughout the rest of the unit, the children will become more familiar with it and with the concept of shade versus sun. Hopefully they will begin to apply this outside in the garden!
Does Grass Need Sun?

**Materials List:**
- Grass seed
- Sterilized potting soil
- Opaque tub with lid
- Chart paper
- Marker

**Purpose:**
To grow grass in less than ideal conditions and observe what happens!

**Instructions:**
Fill the tub with dirt and scatter grass seed. Place the lid on top and leave covered for one week. During the next week, write down the children’s ideas regarding whether the grass will grow without sunlight and how tall they think it will get. After about a week, remove the lid and make observations. You can continue the process of covering and guessing and then uncovering, as long as it holds interest.

**What they learn:**
You will be surprised how hardy grass really is and how much fun the children have making guesses or hypotheses about the growing process!
**Materials List:**
- Large space for movement, preferably in the outdoor garden

**Purpose:**
To encourage physical activity!

**Instructions:**
Gather the children outside near the garden and encourage them to stretch and bend their bodies very slowly. Tell them how healthy activities like yoga and stretching are for our muscles and that spending time in the garden with the growing plants is a very positive, happy thing!

**What they learn:**
Not many children have heard of “yoga” so simply introducing this form of exercise is a fun way to get them moving!
Week 1: Why are garden tools helpful? What types of tools are there? What are tools used for? Vegetable tasting Read “Gardening Tools” by Inez Snyder

Week 2: What are the components of our garden? How can we use things in our classroom? What are the care and safety rules when using tools? Vegetable tasting Read “Paddington Bear in the Garden” by Michael Bond and RW Alley

Week 3: Have any seedlings come up yet? How tall will our plants get? How do we measure them? How do we clean our tools? Vegetable tasting Read “My Hand Rake” by Joanne Barkan and Jody Wheeler

Week 4: Where do we store our tools? What is teamwork and turn taking? What can we use instead of tools? Vegetable tasting Read “My Watering Can” by Joanne Barkan and Jody Wheeler
April “Tools”

Background for Teachers
During the month of April, you will introduce the children to the different types of tools and equipment often used in vegetable gardening. Many of the items you will use this month will be store purchased, but lots of things can be made by using items from your classroom or homes. The children should always be supervised when using garden tools and you should always be working towards correct usage in order to maintain a safe learning environment.

Monthly Goals
Your goal this month is to provide children with a foundation for gardening. They need to build confidence this month and know that they are an instrumental part of the class garden and feel that without them, it would not be as successful. Make sure you don’t do everything yourself this month… allow the children to help! Its okay if they don’t do things “right” and you will find that the earth is very forgiving. Your focus should always be on safety as well as learning and make sure that you are not loosing sight of the ultimate goal… to create a lifetime love of gardening!

What to PLANNT this Month
The last frost in Kentucky is generally around mid-April. This will be the time to start getting some of the indoor or greenhouse transplants going in the outdoor garden. Some other good things to plant this month are corn and peppers. See the planting guide on page x for tips.
Dear Family,

This month’s theme is “Tools” and is the second theme in our Spring Unit, “Planting the Garden.” We are starting to learn how to become little gardeners and how to use tools in a safe and appropriate way.

This month your child will be using tools to create art, make music, and of course… garden! We will also be keeping garden journals this month and hope that you find our discoveries as inspiring and enjoyable as we do!

Happy Digging!

Your Child’s Teacher

At home CONNECTION
If you want to get your little gardener some tools of his or her own, there are lots of sites out there that have some really cute and really useful stuff! Some of the best ones we’ve found are:

www.wackyworldsof.com
www.potterybarnkids.com
www.troybilt.com

Remember that safety is very important and you should always supervise your child when they are using gardening tools!
Tool Puzzles

Materials List:
- Pictures of garden tools (trowels, rakes, shovels, watering cans, etc.)
- Clear contact paper or laminating paper
- Scissors (teachers only)

Purpose:
To introduce the unit on tools to the children through the use of simple puzzles!

Instructions:
Cover both sides of the pictures with the laminating or clear contact paper. Cut the picture out into “puzzle” shapes (as simple or as complex as you’d like) and place the puzzles in the block center. Encourage the children to try to put the pictures back together. Talk with them about what they think the tools are used for in the garden.

What they learn:
As they see the photograph come together they will begin to understand cause and effect relationships as well as work their fine motor skills.

Spring Unit “Planting the Garden”
April Week 1
“Tools”
Blocks and Manipulatives

Garden Check
Make sure your children get at least 15 minutes of hands-on time in the garden each day this week!
Materials List:
- A variety of child size garden tools
- Paint
- Paper

Purpose:
To make patterns and textures in paint using tools!

Instructions:
Place all materials in the art center and encourage the children to paint using only the tools provided. Talk about whether the items they are using are successful in creating a painting and why certain tasks require certain tools!

What they learn:
Through a discussion about the function of tools in every day tasks, children will begin to develop an understanding of how to handle the tools confidently.
Materials List:
- Chart paper
- Marker
- Pictures of garden tools
- A variety of child-size garden tools

Purpose:
Before using the garden tools outdoors, the children need to understand how to use them safely.

Instructions:
Talk with the children about why it’s important to be safe in the garden. Show them the tools and let them hold them and explore them. Then, sit down with a group of children and come up with some safety rules about the tools. You could write things like “always walk when you are holding the trowel” or “only use the rake on the ground” to get them started. Then, allow the children to explore the tools freely in the dramatic play area. Observe their behaviors to see if any of the rules are beginning to stick!

What they learn:
You’ll be surprised at how many ideas the children can come up with on their own as you brainstorm together. The goal is to have them help compile the list so that they will internalize the rules.
Digging & Dumping

Materials List:
• Large tub or sand table
• Sterilized potting soil
• Scoopers, rakes, hand-held shovels, etc.

Purpose:
To allow the children to use the garden tools to dump, dig, and fill!

Instructions:
Place the soil in the table and encourage the children to use the scoopers and tools to dump, dig, and fill. Allow for ample time for each child to explore; as this activity will surely be a favorite!

What they learn:
Little hands were made to dig! This sensory experience will be very relaxing for some of the children and should give them the opportunity to build confidence with using the tools.
Stand Up for Your Veggies

Materials List:
- Large area for movement
- Pictures of vegetables that you hope to grow in your garden or that you have already planted

Purpose:
To remind the children of what they are working towards in the outdoor garden!

Instructions:
Gather the children in a large area either indoors or out. Ask them to sit down and when you show them a picture of the vegetable item, ask them to stand up quickly if they have eaten it before. You can also alter the activity to have children stand if they want to try it, or if they want to grow it, or if they know the name of it. The goal is to get the children moving up and down and to reinforce vegetable recognition!

What they learn:
This fun exercise will remind the children of what the goals are for the garden... growing food!
Measuring Rainwater

**Materials List:**
- Plastic ruler
- Scissors (teachers only)
- Clear, waterproof tape
- Wide mouth jar (quart size works best)

**Purpose:**
Not all “tools” are those that are hand-held and for digging! Rain gauges are tools used to measure rainfall!

**Instructions:**
Place the ruler inside the jar and tape the ruler in place. Place the jar in an open area in the outdoor garden where it can collect rain (not under trees or near the building). After a rain, see how much rain actually fell by measuring the water level with the ruler! You can chart the rainfall in your classroom all month long!

**What they learn:**
Children will have fun checking the jar and measuring how much rain has fallen. You can see if the amount changes as the month goes on and really enhance the mathematical experience for the children.
How Will You Use Your Tools?

Materials List:
• A variety of art materials
• Paper

Purpose:
Now that the children have had an introduction to garden tools, let’s see what their ideas are regarding how to use them!

Instructions:
Place the materials in the art center and encourage the children to draw, paint, or otherwise create a picture of how they plan to use the garden tools out in the garden. Label the pictures with any dictation the children provide and be sure to put their name and date before displacing the art in the classroom.

What they learn:
Anytime you allow for process art and encourage the children to dictate their thoughts and feelings about what they have created, you are making the children feel validated and valued, which is a great self esteem booster!
Materials List:
- Small notebooks (1 for each child)*
- Pencils, crayons, markers

Purpose:
To start the ongoing activity of journaling!

Instructions:
Explain to the children that they are going to be using a journal over the next 2 months to draw, write, or otherwise express their experiences in the garden. Provide time each day for the children to work in their journals as they choose and always offer it right after your 15 minutes of free gardening. Be sure to ask lots of open ended questions to get them thinking, like “what was your favorite thing we did in the garden today? Can you draw it?” Keep the journals in the dramatic play area for easy access!

What they learn:
This ongoing activity will encourage language and literacy. Also, because it is “ongoing” and you will revisit it daily during April and May, the children will begin to view their journal as a means of self-expression!

*Hint, you can always make journals by stapling paper together!
Vegetable Rainbow

Materials List:
- Chart paper
- Markers

Purpose:
To discuss the nutritional value of different vegetables!

Instructions:
Refer to page xxiii for a list of vegetables by color. Encourage the children to come up with different vegetables of different colors and chart them on your paper. You can include pictures of them if you want and descriptive words regarding their taste and texture (if they are items your class has tasted!). Talk about some of the vegetables that are less common and which ones are the most healthy, like dark leafy green vegetables, and those that are rich yellow, orange, or red.

What they learn:
If you keep this chart up for a few days, you can always add items to it that the children think of or are exposed to. Keeping a visual reminder of the vegetables that you are growing in your garden and how healthy they are for our bodies will keep the excitement about the garden going!
Tool Band

Materials List:
• A variety of hand-held tools

Purpose:
To explore the sounds of the tools as they are clicked, tapped, and rolled together!

Instructions:
Place the materials in the music area and allow the children to use them to create sounds. Ask them to describe what types of sounds they are creating and what techniques they are using.

What they learn:
This type of activity should emphasize “focused listening” skills as the children create a sound, listen to it, and describe it. You can also make a sound yourself and ask the children to mimic it using their tools or instruments, which further enhances the learning.
Materials List:
- Child sized rakes
- Sand
- Large tub

Purpose:
Allowing the children to handle the tools and use them as a medium for pattern making.

Instructions:
Place the sand in the tub and set the tub in the block area. Encourage the children to make patterns in the sand using the rakes. Talk with them about the patterns they are creating as they work.

What they learn:
Aside from being a soothing, sensory experience, pattern making is actually an important precursor to writing!
Painting Flower Pots

Materials List:
- Plastic flower pots
- Paint
- Paint brushes

Purpose:
To create personalized pots for planting!

Instructions:
Place the materials in the art area and encourage the children to decorate a flower pot. This can be done individually or in groups to build teamwork! Allow the pots to dry and then encourage the children to plant seeds in them or stuff the pots with a seed packet, create handprint cutouts with planting instructions on them, and give them as gifts!

What they learn:
Painting works fine motor and creative thinking skills! Also, after the pots dry, the children will really enjoy seeing their creations used in the classroom or giving them to someone special!
Materials List:
• Children’s journals from week 2
• Various writing mediums (pencils, markers, crayons, etc.)

Purpose:
Eventually the children will be able to go to their journals freely and work in them with minimal encouragement, however getting them used to this will take time.

Instructions:
Remind the children that their journals are unique and personal to them. Encourage children in small groups to write or draw something related to the unit in their journal. Make sure you are talking to them in an open-ended way to encourage more lengthy and meaningful responses.

What they learn:
Journaling encourages writing and reading skills, and creativity. It also provides an often much-needed quiet time to reflect on the day and what they are learning.
Holes

Materials List:
• Small hand trowels (shovels)
• Large outdoor space for digging

Purpose:
An important component to successful planting is being able to dig holes for the seeds!

Instructions:
Provide a hand tool for each child and encourage them to practice digging holes. Talk about the different depths and widths using measurements that the children can relate to (3 fingers, one teacher hand, etc.). Talk with the children about the consistency of the soil and see if they remember the different types from last month! Be sure to praise the children's efforts and offer close supervision and assistance when necessary.

What they learn:
Learning how to garden is an important component to this program and teaching the children the fundamentals like digging holes will help them build confidence to hopefully develop a life-long love for gardening!
Vegetable Soup

 Materials List:
• Marker
• Chart paper
• Large area for movement

Purpose:
To take a familiar song and add a healthy twist to it!

Instructions:
Copy the words to the song on the chart paper and teach it to the children. Follow the same movements as in “London Bridge’s Falling Down.”

What they learn:
This classic song and game will help get the children moving and encourage turn taking and cooperation!

“We are Making Vegetable Soup”  
(to the tune of “London Bridge’s Falling Down”)

“We are making vegetable soup, Vegetable soup, Vegetable soup.  
We are making vegetable soup Now put in the (vegetable of choice).

Take the __________and stir it up, Stir it up, stir it up,  
Take the __________and stir it up,  
While making vegetable soup.”
Tool Flash Cards

Materials List:
- Pictures of garden tools
- Clear contact paper or laminating paper
- Scissors (teachers only)

Purpose:
To create flash cards that the children can manipulate all week!

Instructions:
Cover both sides of the pictures with the contact paper and trim them to create flash cards. Set the pictures in the block center and encourage the children to investigate them. You could write the name of the tool on the back in lowercase print to help reinforce picture-letter recognition.

What they learn:
If you haven’t already figured out, your children learn by seeing and doing! Allowing them to hold, sort, and manipulate the cards on their own will further reinforce the concepts.

Garden Check
Make sure your children get at least 15 minutes of hands-on time in the garden each day this week!
Color Books

Materials List:

• Paper

• Variety of colored markers, paint, or crayons

• Pictures from magazines of different colored objects

• Glue

• Yarn

• Hole punch

Purpose:
To create a color book for use in the outdoor garden

Instructions:
Set the materials in the art center and encourage the children to create a book of colors by coloring or gluing the pictures onto the paper. Punch holes in the paper and tie the yarn to create a book. During your outdoor gardening time, have the children take their books outside and see how many things they can find that match the colors in their books!

What they learn:
This activity might take a few days to complete and can be repeated outdoors as many times as you and your children like! The children will begin to recognize the matching colors in their outdoor space and take pride in identifying different ones.
Materials List:
• A few disposable cameras

Purpose:
To let the children capture images on film that are important to them!

Instructions:
Encourage the children to take photographs of their friends using their tools and working in the garden. Don't worry if they don't come out perfectly, the point is allowing the children to take ownership!

What they learn:
After the pictures are developed they can be used in a variety of ways to help the children recall events in the garden and their growing classroom!
Magnify It!

Materials List:
- Plastic magnifying glasses

Purpose:
To use a different type of tool!

Instructions:
Explain to the children what type of tool a magnifying glass is and what its purpose is. Allow the children to take the magnifying glasses outdoors today into the garden and see what they find up close! Don’t forget to encourage journaling when you finish so that they can record some of their observations and experiences.

What they learn:
Seeing nature up close is an awesome experience and with you to facilitate the exploration, the possibilities are endless!
Digging Up a Hole

Materials List:
- Chart paper
- Marker

Purpose:
To finish out the unit with a fun song about using our garden tools!

Instructions:
Copy the words to the song on the chart paper and teach them to the children. Encourage them to sing and move with the lyrics.

What they learn:
Hopefully your children have come to understand how garden tools are used and what the outcome of all their hard work will be. This fun song will reinforce this idea in a positive way!

“We Digging up a Hole” (to the tune of the “Dinah won't you blow” section of “I've been working on the railroad!”)

We're digging up a hole, digging up a hole, digging up a hole toda-a-a-y,
We're digging up a hole, digging up a hole, digging up a hole today!

Additional verses:
Dropping in the seeds...
Raking up the dirt...
Sun is gonna shine...
Watering the plant...
Plant is gonna grow...
Spring Unit  Circle-Time Activities Menu

“Planting the Garden”

May Theme “Dig In”

Week 1:  What do we find when we dig in our soil?
How will we work together in the garden? What does cooperation mean?
What has sprouted in our garden so far?
Vegetable Tasting
Read “Vegetable Garden” by Douglas Florian

Week 2:  What are our rules for our garden?
What have we learned so far about gardens? What else do we want to know?
How tall will our plants get?
What should we wear when we work in our garden?
Vegetable tasting
Read “The Ugly Vegetables” by Grace Lin

Week 3:  How can we get our families involved in our garden?
Where could you build a garden?
Are there any other gardens in our community?
Why are gardens good?
Vegetable tasting
Read “The Vegetable Alphabet Book” by Jerry Pallotta

Week 4:  What happens to the food that is grown in a garden?
Where does the food in the store come from?
What is difficult about gardening?
How do we know when the vegetables are ripe?
Vegetable tasting
Read “Apple Picking Time” by Michele B. Slawson
May “Dig In”

Background for Teachers
During the month of May, the real work in the garden will be happening. The children should have a solid understanding of what to do each day during your free gardening time and should be feeling much more comfortable in the space. You will want to talk with the children daily about what their individual role will be in the garden and make them all feel valued. Don’t worry too much about the appearance of the garden… plants will get stepped on, weeds will grow and it’s all part of the learning! Later in the month you will be talking with the children about how to determine if the produce is ripe enough to pick and eat and you will also be hosting an outdoor garden picnic for your families!

Monthly Goals
This month focus on really caring for the garden. You will likely have many mild weather days that are perfect for seeding, watering, weeding, plucking, picking, and exploring! Remember that getting dirty is part of growing up and if you are right there along side your children, the experience will be that much richer!

What to PLANT this Month
Good things to get into the ground this month are beans, cucumbers, squashes, and tomatoes. Refer to the planting guide on page x for tips!
Dear Family,

This month’s theme is “Dig In” and is the final theme in our Spring Unit, “Planting the Garden.” We are really getting busy this month in our garden and are starting to see some of the rewards! We have been keeping garden journals and we will continue to write and draw in them each day as we learn and explore new things in our vegetable garden.

This month your child will be getting down and dirty with nature! We are planning a family picnic later this month with some tasty treats and fun activities and we hope that you can join us!

Happy Gardening!

Your Child’s Teacher

**At home CONNECTION**

Did you know? Vegetables are one of the most rewarding things to grow in a garden because you get to enjoy the end result of your hard work by eating it! To get started at home, read the directions for each vegetable carefully to get the maximum yield from each plant and watch over them for signs of disease or bugs. A little TLC (Tender Loving Care) will go a long way to make your veggies the best on the block!

And remember, the more you take advantage of “gardening moments” with your child, the more likely he or she will be to get out there and explore the natural world!
Garden Check
Make sure your children get at least 15 minutes of hands-on time in the garden each day this week!

Spring Unit “Planting the Garden”
May Week 1
“Dig In”
Blocks and Manipulatives

Picture Blocks

Materials List:
• Pictures taken from cameras in April
• Shoe boxes, milk cartons, empty food boxes
• Colored contact paper
• Newspaper
• Clear contact paper
• Scissors (teachers only)

Purpose:
To make the photographs of the children a permanent fixture in the block area!

Instructions:
Stuff the boxes with newspaper and cover them with the colored contact paper. Then cover the pictures with clear contact paper and attach them to the blocks. Place the blocks in your block center and encourage the children to use them as they please!

What they learn:
The children will have fun building with the homemade blocks with their faces on them!
Spring Unit “Planting the Garden”
May Week 1
“Dig In”
Arts and Crafts

My Garden Job

Materials List:
• Paper
• Paints
• Paint brushes, sponges, and other mediums

Purpose:
To reinforce the concept of taking ownership and to encourage high levels of participation in the garden.

Instructions:
Place the materials in the art area and encourage the children to draw, paint, or otherwise create a picture of them in the garden doing some sort of job. Talk with them open-endedly about what they see their role in the garden being and what new things they’d like to try next time. Start with things like, “Matthew, maybe next time in the garden you could take a turn holding the watering can while we fill it from the hose, what do you think about that?”

What they learn:
As they begin to gain confidence each day in their own ability and realize that you are confident in them to be involved in the garden creation and maintenance, their participation will increase and so will their learning.
Materials List:
• A smooth stone or rock that has been cleaned by boiling it for 30 minutes (large enough not to get lost in the pot)
• Large soup pot
• Root vegetables (carrots, potatoes, celery, onion etc.)
• Vegetable or chicken stock
• Herbs and spices of your choice
• Knife (teacher’s only)
• Cutting board
• Plastic knives
• “Stone Soup” by Marcia Brown (optional)

Purpose:
To work together on a cooking project!

Instructions:
Read the book “Stone Soup” or tell the story (three hungry soldiers who come into a village and cleverly trick the peasants into sharing their food—by making a lavish soup out of seemingly nothing but stones!) and then allow the children to wash the vegetables and assist them in chopping them into small pieces and adding the ingredients one at a time into the pot with the stock. Allow to cook over medium heat for an hour or so and then taste!

What they learn:
If you are able to read the book prior to preparing the recipe, the children will gain conceptual knowledge of the story as they see it acted out in their classroom!
Materials List:
• Small containers for gathering worms
• Magnifying glasses
• Chart paper
• Marker

Purpose:
To go on a scientific discovery of worms!

Instructions:
Talk with the children about why worms are helpful to the soil. Allow the children to dig and lift rocks in search of worms in the outdoor space. Gently collect a few in a container and bring inside. Assist the children in looking at the worms under the magnifying glass and chart their observations. Be sure to ask open ended questions that encourage scientific questioning like “how, why, when, where, etc.” When you are finished gathering information about the worms, gently place them in the garden beds.

What they learn:
If you take the time to discuss the worms’ role in the garden, the children should begin to develop a new understanding and respect for these little creatures! Earthworms are essential underground workers in our garden. They eat decaying plant material namely leaves, and are important to soil structure and fertility. Most earthworms emerge under the safety of darkness and feed on fallen plant material on the surface, and drag fallen leaves and other plant debris into their tunnels. There are 16 species of earthworms!
Materials List:
- Upbeat music that the children can move to
- Large area for movement
- Chart paper
- Marker

Purpose:
To have the children come up with their own ideas for a song about dirt!

Instructions:
Review what you have learned this week about the garden. Talk about the different jobs the children are responsible for and about those creepy crawly worms they investigated! Work together to create a song or poem about your garden. Encourage the children to dance and move freely to the music and the words to your new song!

What they learn:
Getting the children to recall information from past lessons will challenge their memories. Don't get discouraged if they can't remember everything, it doesn't mean they didn't learn something from the activity.
Building with Rocks

Materials List:
- Rocks or stones from the outdoor space
- Chart paper
- Marker

Purpose:
Allowing the children to bring something from the outdoors inside to build with!

Instructions:
Encourage the children to gather rocks from the outside and bring them indoors. Let them clean the rocks by running them under cool water. Set them in the block center and encourage the children to use them in their building and creating! Observe how they use the rocks and record your observations on the chart paper and display it in your classroom.

What they learn:
Working with rocks might not be as easy as it sounds because they come in many different shapes and sizes. This will really work those fine motor and dexterity skills! Each child will use them in a different way, which should be encouraged.

Garden Check
Make sure your children get at least 15 minutes of hands-on time in the garden each day this week!
Outdoor Painting

Materials List:
- Paper
- Paints
- Paint brushes
- Easel or table

Purpose:
To take the art area outside!

Instructions:
If you have an art easel in your classroom, take it outside today and encourage the children to paint what they see in the outdoor space. If you don’t have an easel, a table will work fine.

What they learn:
The goal is to change the environment that the children get to be creative in. If they only always paint inside, they are missing out on a great sensory experience! This will also give them the opportunity to paint exactly what they see in the natural world.
Materials List:
- Poster board or chart paper
- Marker
- Pictures of the children doing different jobs in the garden (or pictures of the object related to the job, for example, a picture of a watering can)
- Clear contact paper
- Velcro (optional)

Purpose:
For the last week and a half you’ve been talking with the children about their role in the garden, now it’s time to make an official job chart!

Instructions:
Discuss the different roles each child plays in the garden. Work together to create a job chart with the different pictures of the responsibilities next to the child’s name. Make sure each child is included somewhere, even if they don’t usually like to participate. You can ask them what they might like to try and put their name next to that activity. Cover the front side of the chart with clear contact paper and mount it in your classroom as a permanent fixture. Be sure that you allow for flexibility with the children as they change their roles based on their interests. You could attach Velcro squares to the poster and make the names moveable based on the interests of the children each week.

What they learn:
If you allow for flexibility and make the names moveable, the children will begin to look to the chart each day for what their responsibilities are, which builds self-confidence and establishes a routine.
Materials List:
- Chart paper
- Pictures of ripe vegetables that have been growing in your garden (not of the plant, but the finished produce)
- Tape
- Marker

Purpose:
To introduce the children to the concept of “ripeness”

Instructions:
Draw a line down the center of the chart paper and write “Ripe” and “Not Ripe” at the top. Tape the pictures of the vegetable items down the left side. Gather the children in the science area and talk about the different characteristics of ripe and unripe produce. Brainstorm what makes a tomato ripe, for example, and write those characteristics in the “Ripe” column. Do the same for the “Not Ripe” column.

What they learn:
When the vegetables are ready for picking in the garden, it will be important for the children to have been introduced to the concept of ripeness so they don’t pick too early! Of course, don’t be frustrated if they still do!

Some examples:
**Tomatoes** – Tomatoes should be soft with a rich red color when they are ripe.

**Eggplant** – Skin should be shiny, firm and a rich purple color.

**Lettuce** – Lettuce heads should be tightly closed, but relatively firm to the squeeze. An immature head of lettuce feels like a puff of air when squeezed.

**Broccoli and cauliflower** - These veggies should have tightly packed flower heads, firm stems, and no sign of yellow or brown.
Materials List:
- Sign language diagram (adapted from the American Sign Language Lesson Tutor, www.lessontutor.com)

Purpose:
Music and song is often considered a language in and of itself, as it is a means for children to express thoughts, ideas, and feelings. Now they will be introduced to a new kind of language!

Instructions:
Copy the poster and display it in your classroom either as a wall mounted image or a book. As the children express interest, teach them a few of the signs and continue to use them in the garden. As interest grows, you can always introduce more signs by searching for different words on the Internet or in reference books!

What they learn:
If you introduce these signs slowly and continue to use them daily, the children will be more likely to retain them.
Materials List:
• Note pads
• Pencils

Purpose:
An extension of a manipulative activity is math; the purpose of this activity is to encourage the children to use their emerging mathematical skills!

Instructions:
Explain to the children how to make “tally marks” to indicate the occurrence of something. Encourage them to count the plants that have sprouted in the outdoor garden by making a “tally mark” for each sprout they see. When you come inside, total them up and talk about how many were seen versus how many were planted. You can introduce basic subtraction concepts by talking about how many more you are expecting to grow, etc.

What they learn:
This activity can be extended in any way you like and you might find that the interest is there to talk more about addition and subtraction. If not, the children will still gain a basic introduction to counting and totaling from observation.
Materials List:
- Card stock or other heavy paper
- A variety of art materials for decorating
- Glue (if needed)

Purpose:
In preparation for your family picnic, create invitations!

Instructions:
Tell the children about your family picnic next Friday and encourage them to decorate a special invitation to someone special. Copy the wording at the bottom of the page (or handwriting your own message) on the inside of the card. Send the invitations home this week.

What they learn:
Planning for the family picnic should be all about fun and excitement! Working with the art materials to create their own personal invite will surely build the excitement for the children and families.

Sample wording:

Dear Family Member,

Next Friday we are planning an outdoor picnic in our garden and we’d love for you to join us!

Come share a healthy snack and see what your child has been “digging” for the last month!

Remember to include specific information on what time parents should arrive!
May Baskets

- Paper
- Glue or stapler
- Ribbon or yarn
- Flowers or greenery

**Purpose:**
Roman children make May baskets to celebrate May Day (May 1st) and children in the United States often make them as a gift to hang on the door knob of a neighbor or friend!

**Instructions:**
Roll the paper into a cone and staple or glue the edges. Attach the ribbon or yarn to the sides to create a handle. Fill with real or paper flowers. Save them until the family picnic, where they can be given to the family members as gifts!

**What they learn:**
If you go over the brief history of the May Basket with the children, they will hopefully come to appreciate traditions in different cultures! More information on May Baskets can be found on the Internet or in reference books.
Materials List:
- A variety of natural materials found outside or brought in by children from home (anything will do, and the more the better!)
- Magnifying glasses
- Large tub or table
- Note cards
- Pencils

Purpose:
To create a living discovery center where the children can explore, feel, and investigate natural objects.

Instructions:
Place all the gathered materials in the tub along with the magnifying glasses and note cards. Encourage the children to explore them freely. As they gain interest, you can ask them open ended questions about the materials and record their thoughts and observations on the note cards; writing their name on the opposite side. After a few days of discovery, you can make a book out of the note cards as a way to extend the learning and help the children with recall.

What they learn:
When children are exploring and investigating freely, the possibilities are endless… encouraging scientific discovery and scientific questioning is a precursor to life long learning and exploration!
Watering Can Relay

Materials List:
• 3 or 4 empty watering cans
• Large area outside for running

Purpose:
To engage the children in a team activity!

Instructions:
Talk to the children about relay races. Explain to them that they will be on 2 or 3 teams and run back and forth in the area you’ve designated; exchanging the watering can each time between different people. Encourage all children to participate and don’t worry if they don’t grasp the concept, as long as they are moving those feet!

What they learn:
Team sports are an important component to social learning. This activity should be fun and get their heart rates up!
Spring Unit “Planting the Garden”
May Week 4
“Dig In”
Blocks and Manipulatives

Garden Steps
Sequencing Cards

Materials List:
- Cardstock or note cards
- Pictures of planting steps on following page
- Clear contact paper or laminating paper
- Scissors (teacher’s only)

Purpose:
To finish out the unit by revisiting the steps to maintaining a garden!

Instructions:
Create sequencing cards by attaching the pictures to the note cards or cardstock. Cover both sides with the clear contact paper and trim the edges to create flashcards. Place the cards in the block area and encourage the children to put them in correct order!

What they learn:
Sequencing pictures is a pre cursor to adding and subtracting!
1. Dig a hole

2. Plant the seeds

3. The seeds will sprout

4. Care for the plants

5. The vegetables will grow

6. Pick the vegetables

7. Eat the vegetables!
Rhubarb Dye

Materials List:
- Rhubarb root
- Knife (teachers only)
- Large pot for simmering
- Strainer
- Eggs
- Small pot for boiling

Purpose:
To decorate eggs using an all-natural dye made from rhubarb!

Instructions:
This activity requires a lot of prep work and supervision; use your judgment on what preparation steps the children can be involved with.
Cut up the rhubarb root into small pieces and simmer the pieces for about an hour or so. Strain out the liquid and discard the root pieces. Allow the liquid to cool. Hard-boil the eggs and then allow the children to dip them in the dye to create different shades of color on their egg. The longer the egg soaks in the dye, the darker and richer the colors will be! Be sure to let the eggs dry and share them with the families at the picnic on Friday!

What they learn:
Most children have dyed eggs before but probably never thought about what they dye is made of or how to make their own. You can write down the directions on a note card and send it home with families if you want as well!
Materials List:
- Streamers and other decorations
- Poster board
- Paints

Purpose:
To decorate the garden space for the family picnic!

Instructions:
Remind the children that they are hosting a garden picnic on Friday. Encourage them to decorate the garden however they choose using streamers and posters to welcome the families!

What they learn:
The children will learn how to prepare the space for their guests and take pride and ownership of their accomplishments!
Materials List:

- A variety of fresh vegetables (preferably those that are ripe that have grown in the garden, but could be store bought if your veggies aren’t ready yet!)
- Plastic knives
- Tupperware containers with lids
- Knife (teachers only)

Purpose:
To wash and chop the vegetables for tasting tomorrow at the picnic!

Instructions:
Allow the children to thoroughly wash the vegetables by running them under cool water and washing away the dirt. Talk with the children about why it is important to wash vegetables before we eat them. Then work with the children to chop the vegetables into bite sized pieces and put them in the Tupperware containers. Store in the refrigerator overnight.

What they learn:
Learning how to care for fresh vegetables is an important skill and this activity will show the children the importance of washing your veggies before you eat them!
**Materials List:**
- Materials needed for family picnic
- Large outdoor space for movement

**Purpose:**
To get the children moving and excited that their families have come to join them for a picnic!

**Instructions:**
Host your family picnic today and be sure to show off all the things the children have been learning about and working on, including pictures, charts, journals and the growing garden! During the party, encourage the children to parade around the garden to show off their hard work!

**What they learn:**
Hopefully the children will learn that hard work pays off and that gardening can be a family affair, as they see their families and friends enjoying the garden!
Notes