Winter Unit

Indoor Gardening

DECEMBER – Get Crafty
JANUARY – Containers
FEBRUARY – Our Growing Classroom
Winter Unit  Circle-Time Activities Menu

“Indoor Gardening”

December Theme

“Get Crafty”

Week 1:  Why is it important to reuse?
What do we have left over from the harvesting?
Do plants have to only grow outside?
Vegetable tasting
Read “Indoor Gardens” by Lori Kinstad Pupeza

Week 2:  What can you make out of household items?
Bring in a household item to create with
What did you enjoy most about harvesting?
Do you garden at home?
Vegetable tasting
Read “Our Community Garden” by Barbara Pollak

Week 3:  What vegetables are your favorites?
What holidays do you celebrate?
How are vegetables used in different cultures?
Bring something from home to make something with
Vegetable tasting
Read “When Winter Comes” by Nancy Van Laan

Week 4:  What are the steps to indoor planting?
How can we bring the outside in?
What are some common wintertime vegetables?
Vegetable tasting
Read “My Indoor Garden” by Carol Lerner
Background for Teachers
This month you will be focusing on all the things that can be made with items left over from the gardening season! It is important for the children to connect the outdoor garden with things they are learning about and exploring inside, and what better way than being creative and getting crafty!

Monthly Goals
This month your goal is to think outside the box. What are some creative things that you’ve made in the past? As teachers, you know that things like empty egg cartons and shoeboxes hold so much potential and now its time to put that creativity to the ultimate test! What can be made with old seeds or seed packets? What about broken garden tools or unused flowerpots? Do you have any left over potting soil? How can we reuse these items to create masterpieces?
Dear Family,

This month’s theme is “Get Crafty” and is the first theme in our Winter Unit, “Indoor Gardening.” This month we will focus on ways to reuse old things from our harvesting season. We will be creating some holiday gifts as well!

It is important that we teach our children not to waste. This has been a recurring theme so far in this program and we’ve talked about recycling and reusing a lot! Please help us by being a good role model at home. Whether you reduce your waste by being more mindful of how much electricity you use or whether you start a recycling program in your home, every little bit counts!

Happy Crafting!

Your Child’s Teacher

**At home CONNECTION**

Even if you have almost no space at all or perhaps you live in a townhouse or apartment, a small corner or balcony can provide adequate space for a child’s container garden. It’s surprising what you can grow! You’ll find special varieties of tomatoes just for this purpose, such as ‘Tiny Tim’ and ‘Patio.’ Sweet and chili peppers, bush beans and other vegetables also do well in containers.

**Here’s how to grow a winter tomato garden:**

You can grow one plant in a 6-inch pot or two plants in larger pots. For a continuous winter supply, start one or two new plants from seed every two weeks. Recommended varieties are Pixie, Patio, Toy Boy, Small Fry or Tiny Tim. These varieties will produce small plants, but they still may need to be staked, especially when they begin to bear fruit. Quarter-inch dowels make good stakes.
Germinate seeds in a small pot with starter mix. Plant seeds about 1/4 inch deep and water. Keep starter mix moist but not soggy. Germination should occur in 5 to 10 days.

Transplant from starter mix into potting soil when seedlings are about 3 inches tall. Fertilize regularly, but lightly, beginning about two weeks after transplanting. Water plants thoroughly, but not too frequently. A catch pan under the pot will keep windowsills dry.

When plants bloom, help Mother Nature along: Tap the main stem and larger side branches with your finger. This moves the plant slightly and encourages pollination. As you tap the plant, you might see a small cloud of pollen falling from the open flowers.

Turn plants occasionally, so all sides get a fair share of sunlight. After each plant has provided a bumper crop and has become unproductive, cut it off at the base, saving the potting soil for future transplants. Toss the old plant in the compost pile.

— From the Colorado State University Cooperative Extension
Block Pressing

Materials List:
- A variety of wooden blocks from your block center
- Fresh flowers or herbs (preferably grown in your classroom or greenhouse, but store bought is ok)
- Masking tape
- Permanent marker

Purpose:
To use something that already exists in the children's world (blocks) to create something new!

Instructions:
Set the materials in your block learning center. Encourage the children to carefully lay the flowers or herbs in between two blocks and press down. Explain that the flowers will come out “pressed” and can then be used to make things. Label each block with a piece of masking tape with the children’s’ names. Leave the block presses for about a week, allowing time for the flowers to dry (they will be used in an arts and crafts activity in week 2).

What they learn:
This activity will encourage patience and is a good opportunity for a lot of open-ended dialogue. Ask questions like “What do you think the flowers will look like when they are done pressing?” The fact that the blocks will be left for an extended amount of time allows the children to go back to the area and check on what they’ve made.
Materials List:
• Pieces of thin material
• Herbs
• Ribbon
• Scissors

Purpose:
This unique little gift will show children one of the many uses of the herbs they planted a few months ago!

Instructions:
Cut the thin fabric into squares (6x6 should be fine). Allow the children to select the herbs they want to use and help them bunch the herbs into a small bundle and wrap the fabric around them. Then tightly tie a piece or ribbon around the top to create a little herb sachet! Encourage the children to smell the sachet and describe their experience. Tell them that they are welcome to give the sachet as a gift or keep it for themselves to smell.

What they learn:
Allowing the children to select their own herbs and participate in the wrapping steps will boost their self-esteem and make them feel proud about what they’ve created!
Materials List:
• Recycled detergent lids or small plastic pots
• Clothespin
• Plaster of Paris
• Glue gun (teachers only)
• Markers
• Index cards

Purpose:
Using recycled household items to create a recipe card holder is a great way to reuse and to tie together the concepts of recycling and cooking!

Instructions:
Mix the Plaster of Paris according to instructions. Pour into the detergent lid or pot; this will give the base some weight so it won’t tip over. Carefully glue the clothespin (pincher side facing the ceiling) to the front of the pot or lid. Allow to dry. Encourage the children to create a recipe using the markers and index cards. Once the holders have set and dry, show the children how to clip their card to the holder.

What they learn:
While creating this gift for a family member, this is a great opportunity to touch on the cooking unit. Ask open-ended questions like “What is your favorite thing to cook using vegetables?” or “What are some of the cooking safety rules that we learned about?”
Materials List:
• A variety of small store bought plants that are wilted, yellowed, or otherwise unhealthy. (If you have some plants that you are trying to grow currently that perhaps aren’t doing so well, these will work too.)

• Makers

• Chart paper

Purpose:
Now that the children have an understanding of the growing and harvesting process, allow them to care for some sick plants and put that knowledge to use!

Instructions:
Gather the children and talk with them about why the plant is unhealthy. What are their ideas about what’s not going well for the plant? Too little sun? Not enough water? Write down their thoughts on the chart paper and display it in your classroom. Then allow the children to choose a plant to “adopt” and care for in the next few weeks. If there are not enough ill plants for all children you could allow groups to “adopt” one or perhaps just have one class adopted plant. Encourage the parents to allow the plant to go home on Friday to be watered and looked after and then brought back to the classroom on Monday. Make sure all children have the opportunity to take the plant home.

What they learn:
Caring for plants is a very important job and this activity will allow the children to develop skills like self-help, responsibility, teamwork, and experience feelings like empathy and concern. Hopefully the plant will be returned to a healthy state and the children will be able to see their hard work pay off!
Materials List:
- A variety of seeds and beans
- Clear plastic water and soda bottles

Purpose:
Reusing “trash” and some old seeds is a great way to create a musical instrument!

Instructions:
Allow the children to put some seeds into the plastic bottles. You can experiment with different amounts or types to create different sounds. Secure the lid and encourage the children to shake them and create music! These shakers can go home or be kept in the music area for continued use!

What they learn:
Music is a great way to get children moving and if they’ve created their own instruments they are more likely to stay involved with the activity!
Make Your Own Seed Packets

Materials List:
• A variety of seeds and beans
• Paper
• Markers
• Tape

Purpose:
To create their own seed packets!

Instructions:
Fold the paper and tape it in the form of a small packet; leave an opening at the top. Allow children to fill it with seeds and decorate the outside.

What they learn:
All season long the children have been handling seeds — now they get the chance to create their own and test their memories!
Materials List:
- Cardstock
- Pressed flowers from week 1
- Clear contact paper
- Marker

Purpose:
To extend the block pressing activity and create a unique personal card!

Instructions:
Remind the children about how they pressed their own flowers last week. Cut the cardstock sheets in half and fold them over in the shape of a small note card. Cut sections of clear contact paper out and allow the children to place their pressed flowers onto the sticky side. Then encourage them to turn the sticky side over and press it onto the cardstock. Ask them to whom they’d like to make their card to and if there was a special message they’d like to write. Allow them to decorate their card. Write each child’s name on the cards they’ve created.

What they learn:
By connecting an early activity to this one you will help the children build their memory and cognitive understanding of a given concept or idea. It is also a great opportunity to encourage creativity!
Ziploc Bag Book

Materials List:
• Same size Ziploc bags
• Hole punch
• Yarn
• Seeds, pressed flowers, herbs, or plant parts
• Permanent marker

Purpose:
To create a book out of a variety of reusable materials!

Instructions:
Encourage the children to fill the bags with different materials. Ask them to describe the materials and the choices they are making. Write on the bag anything interesting the children say about the materials or the process. Once a few bags have been filled, hole punch them on the “zipper” side and tie yarn to create a book for the children to look through.

What they learn:
This activity should get their creative juices going and carry them into different sorts of dramatic play.
Floating Flowers

Materials List:
• Water
• Tubs or water table
• A variety of real or artificial flowers and leaves

Purpose:
To explore the properties of water and things that float in it!

Instructions:
Make sure children wash their hands before participating in any water or sensory experience. Put lukewarm water into tubs or water table and allow children to explore it freely. Place a tub with flowers and leaves next to the water area and encourage the children to explore what pieces float and why.

What they learn:
Water play is a very soothing activity for young children and you will find that those who participate stay engaged for a long time. It is a great opportunity for you to discuss plant parts and the properties of water and the concept of floating.
Materials List:
• Clean socks
• Beans
• Rubber bands

Purpose:
To create a bean bag out of old socks and beans!

Instructions:
Allow the children to fill the socks with beans or any other material that you choose (seeds, oats, etc.). Tightly wrap a rubber band around the top of the sock to seal it closed. Encourage the children to toss them and shake them to music!

What they learn:
This will give children a great chance to get moving during the cold winter months! You can also use this activity to talk about measurement and other math concepts.
Plant Markers

Materials List:
- Large Popsicle sticks
- Pictures of vegetables
- Markers
- Tape or glue

Purpose:
Allowing the children to create a plant marker for the indoor plants or for the outdoor garden you’ll start in a few months is a great way to encourage building and math skills.

Instructions:
Explain to the children that when you plant seeds it is important to not only get them the right distance apart but to be able to recognize what you’ve planted where! Encourage them to select a picture and attach it to the Popsicle stick using tape or glue. They can decorate the stick or simply write their name on the stick and it can be used indoors or out.

What they learn:
This activity provides teachers with the opportunity to expose the children to measurement and math concepts. Also, because the pieces are small it is a great project for working those fine motor skills.
Handprint Flowers

Materials List:
• Colored construction paper
• Scissors
• Tape
• Paper towel rolls or Popsicle sticks

Purpose:
Allowing the children to create something decorative using their hands!

Instructions:
Trace the child’s hand on the colored paper a few times (at least 4). Cut out the tracing and bunch the tracings together. Attach the handprints to the towel roll or stick using tape. Fold the fingers down to create a beautiful flower! You could use different colors if the child wants to, or create different size tracings to create depth in the “flower.”

What they learn:
Helping you construct a flower from scratch will be fun for the children and using their handprints allows them to feel that the creation is personal to them. Displaying the flowers in your classroom is a great way to show that you value what they have created.
Materials List:
• Paper towel or toilet paper rolls
• Seeds of different shapes and sizes
• Paint
• Glue

Purpose:
To create jewelry out of seeds!

Instructions:
Cut the towel or toilet paper roll into small pieces about 1 ½ inches wide (keep the ring intact). Allow the children to paint the seeds and let them dry. When they are dry, encourage them to glue them onto their roll. Allow to dry. When it is fully dry, slip it onto their wrist to make a homemade bracelet!

What they learn:
This activity is a great opportunity to talk about different cultures and how they dress and jewelry they wear. Hopefully the children will want to engage in dramatic and pretend play with their newly created jewelry!
Materials List:
- Old fabric puppets or socks
- Soil
- Grass seeds
- Bucket or tub

Purpose:
To grow grass in a puppet!

Instructions:
Allow the children to fill the socks or puppets with dirt and add grass seed. Set them in the tub to catch the water. Watch as the grass grows!

What they learn:
This activity will introduce children to the idea that not all plants have to grow in a conventional pot! Next month you will be exploring all sorts of unusual containers for growing!
Winter Unit “Indoor Gardening”
December Week 3
“Get Crafty”
Music and Movement

In My Indoor Garden

Materials List:
• Marker
• Chart paper

Purpose:
To use songs to tie together the concepts you’ve been working on with the children this month.

Instructions:
Copy the lyrics to the poem and display them in your classroom. Encourage the children to sing them with you.

What they learn:
This short little rhyme will be easy for them to learn and they should enjoy singing along!

“In my Indoor Garden”
(to the tune of “Over in the Meadow”)

In my indoor garden I don’t have a rake or hoe
But I can plant little seeds in a nice straight row
“Grow I will say, “Please grow all day long!”
And the little seeds will grow
Into plants, big and strong!
Garden Stones

**Materials List:**
- Plaster of Paris
- Newspaper
- Area for drying

**Purpose:**
To create beautiful decorative stones for the outdoor garden!

**Instructions:**
Prepare the Plaster of Paris according to the directions. Allow the children to press their hands into the mold and create a handprint; or decorate them anyway you choose. Allow to dry on newspaper and save them for decorating the outdoor garden this spring!

**What they learn:**
By using the Plaster of Paris, you can introduce concepts related to texture, feel, temperature, weight, and color. It is also a great sensory experience for the children.
**Painted Garden Rocks**

**Materials List:**
- Smooth stones or rocks
- Paint
- Paint brushes

**Purpose:**
Allowing the children the freedom to decorate the rocks however they choose will empower them to get their creative juices going!

**Instructions:**
Set the materials out in your art area and encourage the children to decorate the rocks. Explain to them that they will be used in the garden as decorations.

**What they learn:**
Free, “process” art is a very important element in an early childhood classroom because the children aren’t restricted to just creating one thing, one way. This activity is also a great opportunity to work on math concepts like counting, sorting, and comparing size.
**Nesting Materials**

**Materials List:**
- A variety of materials like yarn, string, cotton, fabric scraps, etc.
- A basket or container for collecting

**Purpose:**
Children should be exposed to all sorts of homes, even animal homes! Perhaps you’ve taken a walk outside and seen a birds nest. This activity will give the children the opportunity to learn about why birds make nests and what types of materials are good nesting materials.

**Instructions:**
Have the children gather these types of materials with you. Make sure they are all very small pieces. Talk with them about birds and why they are important in a garden (they eat insects, etc.) Ask the children if they’d like to help the birds make a home and explain that by setting out these materials, the birds might use some of them in their nesting this spring! In a few months you might find some of them in a birds nest!

**What they learn:**
This activity will help the children develop an understanding of the natural world around them.
Materials List:
- Clean baby food jars or other small clear containers
- Thin fabric squares
- Yarn or ribbon
- Dried herbs
- Scissors

Purpose:
To create a gift for someone special using herbs grown in the garden!

Instructions:
Assist the children in filling their jar or container with the herbs. Cut small holes or slits in the fabric and cover the top of the jar. Tie tightly around the mouth of the jar to secure. Trim the edges with the scissors. Encourage the children to smell the herbs through the fabric and talk with them about what they experience. Ask open ended questions like, “What do you think of that smell?” or “Can you tell what herb that is?”

What they learn:
Every project or activity should have an educational objective. Even this simple craft project is a sensory experience for the children because you can explore the scents of the different combinations of herbs.
Materials List:

- Anything that you can gather on different cultures and how they celebrate different winter holidays, preferably anything related to the use of gardens or nature celebrations

- Fresh vegetable snacks

Purpose:
This activity is designed to get your families involved and to incorporate multicultural elements into your classroom!

Instructions:
Invite your parents to participate and encourage them to provide pictures, books, or materials that are part of a winter holiday that they celebrate. Most cultures have different celebrations related to the seasons, harvesting, or nature. They don’t have to be holidays that occur in December, and the more you can incorporate about gardens, the better! Be sure to serve yummy vegetable snacks to your guests!

What they learn:
By exposing young children to different cultures and diversity, you are providing them with the opportunity to question the world around them and to become active participants in it. Also, it is a great opportunity to get families involved with the learning process!
Winter Unit  Circle-Time Activities Menu

“Indoor Gardening”

January Theme

“Containers”

**Week 1:**
- What is a container?
- Let’s compare sizes and shapes of containers in our classroom
- Why is drainage important?
- Vegetable tasting
- Read “Growing Colors” by Bruce McMillan

**Week 2:**
- Can you make a container?
- What else can you grow a plant in besides a pot?
- What are the steps to planting a seed?
- Vegetable tasting
- Read “Counting in the Garden” by Kim Parker

**Week 3:**
- Is our classroom ready for the growing season?
- Have you ever grown something before?
- What do our “adopted” plants need?
- What is the hardest part about caring for plants?
- Vegetable tasting
- Read “Indoor Gardens” by Lori Kinstad Pupeza

**Week 4:**
- Let’s take inventory (refer to checklist at front of manual)
- What can you put in a container?
- Let’s talk about seeds!
- How much soil do we need?
- Vegetable tasting
- Read “The Empty Pot” by Demi
January “Containers”

Background for Teachers
This month you will be focusing on different containers that can be used in gardening. You are still doing the majority of your gardening indoors so it will be important to explore ways to grow things without the use of the outdoor garden space. Really think outside the pot this month!

Monthly Goals
This month your goal is to really start introducing the concepts of growing things to the children. In February there will be quite a bit of planting, believe it or not, so this month it will be important to create a solid framework that the children can begin to understand. You will want to get your families involved in both a “container drive” in week 2 and in the continuation of the “adopt a plant” project you’ve been working on. With any luck, those sick plants are starting to perk up with all the TLC they’ve been receiving! Re-read the planting tips in the front section of the manual and become familiar with the planting guides.
Dear Family,

This month’s theme is “Containers” and is the second theme in our Winter Unit, “Indoor Gardening.” This month we will focus on things that we can plant seeds in! There is about to be a lot of growth in the next few weeks and we are going to need your help to get our classroom ready for the spring growing season! In a week, we will ask you to participate in a “container drive” so start saving your yogurt containers, milk cartons, and old boots!

Remember that as long as it holds soil, it can be a growing container! We ask that you go along with us as we open our minds to new ideas and think outside the pot!

Happy Potting!

Your Child’s Teacher

At home CONNECTION

If insufficient space or an unsuitable area limits your vegetable gardening, consider the possibility of raising fresh, nutritious, homegrown vegetables in containers. A windowsill, a patio, a balcony or a doorstep will provide sufficient space for a productive mini-garden. Almost any vegetable that will grow in a typical backyard garden will also do well as a container-grown plant. Vegetables that are ideally suited for growing in containers include tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, green onions, beans, lettuce, squash, radishes and parsley. Pole beans and cucumbers also do well in this type of garden, but they do require considerably more space because of their vining growth habit.
Container Sort

Materials List:
• A variety of containers (cans, film canisters, yogurt containers, egg cartons, etc.)
• Large box
• Chart paper
• Marker

Purpose:
To introduce a variety of shapes and sizes of containers.

Instructions:
Place the containers in the box and set the box in your block area. Encourage the children to explore the materials freely. Observe how the use the materials and write down your observations on the chart paper and display it in your classroom.

What they learn:
Allowing the children to explore the materials freely will help them build their confidence for when you actually start planting in them! It is also a great opportunity to encourage counting, sorting, and other math concepts.
Materials List:
- Radish seeds
- Large clear sandwich bags
- Soil
- Water

Purpose:
To discover first hand what plants need to grow: water, sunlight, and carbon dioxide.

Instructions:
Talk with children about oxygen and carbon dioxide. Explain to them that when we breathe in we intake oxygen and when we breathe out we emit carbon dioxide, which is taken in by plants. Have children assist you in putting some potting soil in the bag. Then allow children to drop a few radish seeds into the soil and add a small amount of water. Next, gently blow into the bag and seal it shut, holding the carbon dioxide in. Hang the bags in a windowsill and allow to germinate (may take up to 2 weeks).

What they learn:
This activity is a lesson in both creativity and science as the children get to discover the process of growth in a more hands on way! Allowing the children to observe the growth over time extends the learning and allows for a more in depth discovery of the concepts.
Materials List:
• Film containers
• Cotton balls
• Yarn
• Vegetable seeds
• Screw eye hooks

Purpose:
To create jewelry that grows!

Instructions:
Allow children to put two to four small cotton balls into the canister and then drop a few seeds down by the balls (large seeds work best: peas, cantaloupe, etc.). Add a few drops of water, just until the cotton balls are damp. Use a screw-eye and screw it through the center of the lid. Put the lid on the container tightly. Thread yarn through the hook and tie to make a necklace. Encourage the children to wear them daily, perhaps during your group time and watch as they bloom! When they are not being worn, hang them near a window so they can get sunlight. Be sure to put each child's name on them.

What they learn:
This wearable garden will be a great learning opportunity for the children and can be used in a variety of ways in your classroom!
Carrots!

Materials List:
- Clean, empty egg cartons
- Carrot seeds
- Potting soil
- Water
- Ink pen

Purpose:
To start the indoor garden in an unusual container!

Instructions:
Poke a small hole in the bottom of the egg carton (at each “hole”). Put a small amount of soil in the egg carton and place carrot seeds in the dirt. Water slightly and set by a window. You could mark the individual child’s plant with the markers they made back in December for a personal touch!

What they learn:
Talk about why egg cartons make good growing containers and why good drainage for plants is important. This will get the kids excited to start the growing season!
I Like...

Materials List:
- Chart paper
- Marker

Purpose:
Using chants and finger plays to reinforce concepts of healthy eating!

Instructions:
Copy the words to the chant on the chart paper and display it in your classroom. Teach the song to the children and encourage their participation in the music area.

What they learn:
This “fill in the blank” activity should get the children thinking about what food items they like and don’t like and will be a spring board for further discussions on nutrition and healthy food choices.

“I like (insert food item)…”

(children repeat…)

it’s very (“healthy” or “not healthy”)

(children repeat…”)

*Continue with all children and record their food item on the chart paper as well. You could even extend the learning into your math area by graphing or charting the responses.
Materials List:
• Bucket or basket large enough to hold donated containers

Purpose:
To really get involved with this unit, you will need a variety of containers that can be found at home and the goal of this activity is to hold a container “drive” all week so that parents can donate to the classroom!

Instructions:
Make sure all parents have received their family newsletter. You could write up another note regarding this drive if you want. Encourage them to donate all sorts of containers (old pots, boots, yogurt containers shoe boxes, baby food jars, egg cartons, etc.)

What they learn:
This activity will help the children’s families get involved and as new items are brought in will give the children a sense of pride that they have contributed to their classroom from home!
Materials List:
• A variety of paints
• Paint brushes
• Clean, empty yogurt containers of any size

Purpose:
To decorate the “pots” you will be planting in!

Instructions:
Set out the “pots” and painting materials and encourage the children to decorate them however they want. Allow to dry and then use them to plant vegetable seeds in your classroom! Be sure to cut a small hole in the bottom of the container and set them in a tray or bucket so that water can run out and proper drainage can be achieved.

What they learn:
Art is a great way to encourage creativity and boost self esteem. Because they can decorate their pot however they choose, you are allowing them to build these skills! Be sure to use lots of open-ended language during the activity and ask them questions about the choices they make.
Feed Your Plants

Materials List:
- Chart paper
- Marker
- Artificial plants
- Watering cans
- “Plant food” (can be baggies with oatmeal or rice, labeled as such or empty, sealed fertilizer containers)

Purpose:
Encourage the children to give ideas and then observe them applying the concepts in free play!

Instructions:
Ask the children what plants need to grow. Talk to them about the fact that plants do “eat” and that they need nutrients and water to grow big and strong. Talk with them about pot size and how the plants they’ve started in the tiny containers will soon outgrow them and need to be moved to the outdoor garden so they can thrive. Make a chart with the children’s suggestions about what plants need to grow. Post the chart the dramatic play area along with the other materials and encourage the children to engage in pretend play as if they were in a plant nursery.

What they learn:
Dramatic or pretend play allows the children to explore on their own terms and at their own pace. Giving them the language regarding plant care will hopefully lead to some fun and educational explorations!
Seasons

Materials List:
- Photographs of landscapes at different times of the year
- Clear contact paper or laminating paper
- Marker
- Chart paper

Purpose:
During the winter months you will have to find creative ways to bring the outside in!

Instructions:
Cover the pictures front and back, with laminating or contact paper. Place them in the science area. As the children explore the pictures throughout the day, ask them what they think about what they see. Talk about the differences between seasons and write down some of their ideas on the chart paper and display it in your classroom. You could extend the learning to the art area by allowing the children to draw their own interpretation of a season!

What they learn:
This activity allows for exploration on the child’s terms. Because it is unstructured, not all children will be drawn to it immediately and you may want to leave it out for a few days for further exploration and discussion!
Materials List:
- Plastic tubs of various sizes
- A variety of things to “bang” with
- Small containers with lids
- Small beans, seeds, or bells

Purpose:
This activity will allow children to make their own music using containers!

Instructions:
Place the small items in the containers and seal the lids to create homemade container shakers. Place all the materials in the music area and encourage the children to make music anyway they choose!

What they learn:
Music has been shown to be a great stress reliever for children, especially those with learning disabilities. If you find that some children are more drawn to this activity than others, be flexible and allow for a longer time for them to explore the noise makers!
Container Puzzles

Materials List:
- A variety of pictures of pots, planters, and other containers that can be used for growing plants
- Clear contact paper or laminating paper
- Scissors (teachers only)

Purpose:
To create homemade puzzles using realistic photographs of familiar objects to tie together the thematic unit!

Instructions:
Cover the front and back of the pictures with the contact or laminating paper. Cut the picture into pieces, as simple or as complex as you choose. Place the materials in the block center and encourage the children to work the puzzles and put the container picture back together! *Hint, you could take actual photographs of the planters and containers in your room and then allow the children to see those empty containers while they attempt to reassemble the puzzles.

What they learn:
Working puzzles is a great way to enhance fine motor and concentration skills for young children.
Materials List:
- A variety of art supplies (paint, crayons, markers, things to glue, etc.)
- Paper

Purpose:
To get the children to think about what a container for a plant might look like!

Instructions:
Place all materials in the art center or at your art easel. Encourage the children to create a picture of a container that they think would make a good growing space for a plant. Talk to them in an open-ended way about what they create; ask questions like “why did you choose that color?” or “tell me what kind of container this is.”

What they learn:
Through process art activities, the children will gain a sense of accomplishment and be able to think creatively.
Materials List:
• Seed packets (bought from store or made by children)
• Cash register
• Play money
• Plastic pots and planters

Purpose:
To let the children pretend to buy and sell supplies for planting!

Instructions:
Place materials in the dramatic play center. You could even make a poster that lets parents and children know that you are turning your classroom into a store! Allow children to explore the materials and engage in pretend play.

What they learn:
Pretend play is a great way for children to socialize, build teamwork skills, and self-help skills. It is always a great opportunity for you as the teacher to get involved in the learning and the playing with them!
Materials List:
• Clean kitchen sponges
• Grass seed
• Small trays or pans
• Ribbon or yarn
• Scissors (teachers only)

Purpose:
This unique way of planting will show the children that containers can be anything that holds the plant!

Instructions:
Make a small hole through the center and thread the ribbon or yarn through it. Tie a good knot at one end of the ribbon. Wet the sponge and sprinkle the seed over it and into the air holes. Hang the sponge in a sunny window with the tip of it resting in a shallow pan or tray of water. Seeds will sprout so long as the children keep water in the pans!

What they learn:
This experiment will delight the children as they watch and observe the growth of the grass!
Materials List:
• Chart paper
• Marker

Purpose:
To teach the children a Navajo planting song and bring multiculturalism into the classroom.

Instructions:
Copy the words to the song on the chart paper and display it in the classroom. Talk with the children about Native Americans and why they are important to our history.

What they learn:
The children will love learning about a different culture and anything that you can add to enhance the experience for them would be great (pictures of Navajo Indians, a guest speaker, Native American artifacts and music, etc.)

“Truly in the east
The white bean
And the great corn plant
Are tied with the white lightning.
Listen! rain approaches!
The voice of the bluebird is heard.
Truly in the east
The white bean
And the great squash
Are tied with the rainbow.
Listen! rain approaches!
The voice of the bluebird is heard.”
Materials List:
- A variety of containers (yogurt containers, shoeboxes, pots, etc.)
- Area for sorting
- Measuring devices (rulers, tape measures, etc.)

Purpose:
To have children classify and sort by size

Instructions:
Place materials in the block center and encourage the children to sort the objects by size. Allow them to manipulate them and talk to them about measurement and how to use the measurement devices.

What they learn:
This activity introduces math concepts and will be helpful when the planting season begins because there will be some measurements that the children can help with!
Painting With Containers

Materials List:
- Paper
- Paints
- A variety of different types of containers

Purpose:
To allow the children to paint without using paintbrushes!

Instructions:
Tell the children that they may paint using any of the containers in the art area. Encourage them to use the pots and boxes in different ways (rolling, stamping, pressing, etc.)

What they learn:
This “outside the pot” activity will get the children thinking about creative ways to create art!
Materials List:
- Adopted plants that your children have helped care for
- Paper
- Markers

Purpose:
To allow the plants that the children have helped bring back to health go home!

Instructions:
Create an “adoption” certificate using the paper and markers. Make sure that the parents of the children have volunteered ahead of time to take the plants home and remember there may not be enough for all children. Talk to the children about all the things they have done for the plants and whether the process has been successful or not.

What they learn:
This activity allows the children to develop empathy and basic care taking skills for plants.
Soil Exploration

Materials List:
• Sterilized potting soil or dirt from the outdoor garden
• Objects to dig with
• Markers
• Chart paper
• Magnifying glasses
• A variety of large containers or tubs

Purpose:
Since the planting season will be coming soon, it will be important for the children to start really getting their hands dirty and doing some investigative digging!

Instructions:
Fill the containers with dirt or potting soil and allow the children to dig in the dirt. Encourage exploration and scientific questioning; use the magnifying glasses to discover characteristics of the soil. Have the children make observations and record them on the chart paper and hang it in the science center.

What they learn:
Children develop ideas about science from their life experiences and balancing exploration and reasoning provides a strong basis for learning! Not to mention you are allowing them to touch and feel the dirt and hopefully get more comfortable with getting their hands dirty!
Materials List:
- Marker
- Chart paper

Purpose:
To conclude the unit with a fun little song!

Instructions:
Copy the words to the poem and display it in your classroom.

What they learn:
This unit has hopefully helped you introduce the idea of different containers and ways to grow things indoors. This song should help initiate open-ended conversations about what they have learned this month!

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

“I’m a Little Planter,
 I hold dirt.
Fill me with seeds,
And water, just a squirt!
When my little sprout
Gets too big
Move it to the garden
Rake, and dig!”
Winter Unit  Circle-Time Activities Menu

“Indoor Gardening”

February Theme

“Our Growing Classroom”

Week 1:
- What is a vegetable garden? What are the steps to planting?
- How do we transplant our seedlings outdoors?
- What should we plant in the outdoor garden?
- Vegetable tasting
- Read “Zinnia’s Flower Garden” by Monica Wellington

Week 2:
- What can be planted in February? (Carrots, Lettuce, and Onions can be started outdoors this month—refer to the planting guide on page x)
- What do we know about gardening?
- What do we want to know about gardening?
- Bring in a book about gardens!
- Vegetable tasting
- Read “Planting a Rainbow” by Lois Ehlert

Week 3:
- Why are vegetables important?
- What are the rules of the garden? What should our garden look like?
- What is teamwork?
- How do we make our garden grow? What will it need?
- Vegetable tasting
- Read “3 Pandas Planting” by Megan Halsey

Week 4:
- How tall are we? How tall will our plants get?
- What do you wear in the garden?
- What is “the frost”?
- Vegetable tasting
- Read “Whose Garden is it?” by Marry Ann Hoberman and Jane Dyer
February

“Our Growing Classroom”

Background for Teachers
During the month of February, you will actually get to plant some seeds in the outdoor garden! The month will be all about discovering what a garden is and what role the children will play in its creation. Spend time talking about the concepts and incorporate anything related to vegetable gardening to help reinforce the material.

Monthly Goals
Your goals are going to be first, to help the children conceptualize what a vegetable garden is, the steps to starting and maintaining one, and what role the class will play in your school garden. The second goal will be to actually start some of the planting, so get ready to spend some quality time each day working the soil, clearing the area for planting, and stocking up on supplies you will need for the project. Your third goal this month is to build excitement about gardening with the children and families. The activities themselves are fun and educational, but the total experience will be as great as you make it! Call on your resources; fellow teachers, parents, family members, and the children in your classroom, to really get this garden growing!

What to PLANT this Month
You can start some outdoor planting in the later part of February. Good things to plant this month are carrots, lettuce, and onions because they do well in cool soil. Refer to the planting guide on page x for tips!
Dear Family,

This month’s theme is “Our Growing Classroom” and is the final theme in our Winter Unit, “Indoor Gardening.” This month we will focus on what vegetable gardening is. Your child will be introduced to new concepts and even get to do some outdoor planting, believe it or not! In a couple of weeks we will be holding a seed drive and we’d love to have you help us collect vegetable seeds for our spring planting season!

We are hoping that you will partner with us to build excitement about gardening with your children. Talk with them about what they are learning and what you can do to extend the learning at home. This experience will be what we all make it, and we hope that you are as excited as we are to get started!

Happy Growing!

Your Child’s Teacher

**At home CONNECTION**

Gardening with kids of any age encourages their interest in nature and enthusiasm early on in life, and will give them invaluable basic skills and understanding of how the ecosystem works.

Children have an innate interest in all things natural. They love playing with mud, planting seeds, and watching them grow… watching caterpillars and butterflies, digging up buried treasure in the form of carrots, parsnips, and potatoes… working out clever defenses against slugs and snails… the joys and adventures of gardening just go on and on!

So dig in with your kids in anyway you can!
A Garden Bed

Materials List:
- A variety of wooden blocks from the block center
- A variety of artificial plants
- A variety of plastic vegetables

Purpose:
Because you will be working on the outdoor garden space with the children, it is important to get them thinking about the design of a garden bed.

Instructions:
Place materials in the block center and encourage the children to design a garden bed. Talk to them about space for the different plants and putting those that will grow taller in the back so they don't block the sun from shorter growing plants.

What they learn:
This activity should get them thinking about the construction of a garden, what they want to grow, and what will be involved in the care taking of the outdoor space.

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 art materials (markers, paints, crayons, colored pencils, etc.)
- A variety of paper

**Purpose:**
Having the children create their own plant will give them a chance to think creatively.

**Instructions:**
Place all materials in the art center and encourage the children to create any type of plant they choose. Talk with them about what they are drawing and write down any descriptions of their creation on the paper. Label the pictures with the children’s names and display them in your classroom.

**What they learn:**
Creating “process” art allows the children to visualize an idea, create it, and see it valued by their peers as it is displayed.
Home for an Avocado

Materials List:
- A picture of an avocado plant
- An avocado pit (seed)
- Soil
- Small pot
- Chart paper
- Marker

Purpose:
This planting activity will allow the children to combine the science of planting with the concept of providing a “home” for a seed.

Instructions:
Show the children the avocado plant photograph and the pit. Talk to them about what a proper “home” for a seed would be (warm dirt for protection, water to drink, sunlight, etc.). Ask them to identify similarities between the homes they live in and the needs they have to the home and needs of the avocado pit. Write down their ideas on the chart paper and display it in the classroom. Together, plant the seed and water it daily.

What they learn:
Hopefully the children will begin to understand that seeds and plants are living things with needs. Using language that is familiar to them, like “home” and “food” will help them connect the concepts.
Materials List:
• A variety of potatoes (preferably ones that have been sitting a while and have begun to sprout “eyes”)
• Soil
• Large pot or planter
• Knife (teachers only)
• Chart paper
• Marker

Purpose:
When you plant with children it is important to engage in discussions that encourage scientific questioning.

Instructions:
Sit down with the children and explain to them that the small bumps on the potato are called “eyes.” Ask them open-ended questions and encourage them to think scientifically about what the “eyes” are for. Explain to them that the “eyes” are how the potato makes more potatoes! After the children have explored the potato, cut it into four equal pieces and plant them about four inches deep in the soil. Water daily and wait for the sprouts to come up. Talk with the children about what is going on underneath the soil. Again ask them what they think. Keep track of their ideas and observations on the chart paper and keep it displayed in the science center. As the sprouts get taller, you can encourage the children to measure them or to take scientific guesses as to how tall it will get, etc.

What they learn:
When children explore things scientifically, they are learning how to reason; how to make a guess or hypothesis about something and then observe the cause and effect relationship.
Materials List:
- Chart paper
- Marker

Purpose:
This playful song will help the children learn what plants need to grow!

Instructions:
Copy the words to the song on the chart paper and teach them to the children. You could extend the activity by finding pictures that represent the different verses (clouds, rain, dirt, plants, flowers, etc.).

What they learn:
If you use songs and rhymes throughout the unit to reinforce the ideas, the children are more likely to internalize the concepts.

“Five spring flowers”
Five spring flowers, all in a row.
The first one said, “We need rain to grow!”
The second one said, “Oh my, we need water!”
The third one said, “Yes, it is getting hotter!”
The fourth one said, “I see clouds in the sky.”
The fifth one said, “I wonder why?”

Then BOOM went the thunder
And ZAP went the lightning!
That springtime storm was really frightening!
But the flowers weren’t worried—no, no, no, no!
The rain helped them to grow, grow, GROW!
Boxes

Materials List:
• A variety of boxes
• Pictures of vegetables

Purpose:
To allow the children to start thinking about what they want to grow in the outdoor garden!

Instructions:
Place the materials in the block center and encourage the children to sort the pictures however they choose.Observe their behaviors and talk open-endedly with them about what they’d like to grow in the outdoor garden and why.

What they learn:
This activity will get the children and you thinking about what to grow this season!
Materials List:
- A variety of shoe boxes used in yesterday’s activity
- Paint
- Paint brushes or sponges
- Newspaper

Purpose:
As the spring planting season draws closer, it will be necessary to have a seed drive and you will need something to put your seeds in!

Instructions:
Explain to the children that you are going to have their families help by contributing a package of vegetable seeds to the classroom. Ask them for ideas on the types of things they’d like to grow. Paint or decorate the boxes and label them with the different vegetables the children have decided to grow and use them for collecting the seed packets the families bring in this week!

What they learn:
Getting families involved is a great way to extend the learning to the home. It is important for the children to understand the group effort that is involved in planning and starting a garden!
Materials List:
- A variety of garden gloves of different fabrics, sizes, and textures
- Chart paper
- Marker

Purpose:
To encourage free exploration of a gardening item that might become very familiar!

Instructions:
Put the gloves in the dramatic play center and allow the children to explore them freely. Talk with them about why they think gloves would be helpful when working in the garden. Chart their responses and post the chart in your classroom.

What they learn:
This activity will allow the children to think freely about what gloves might be useful for. Remember, there are no wrong answers!
Materials List:
- Aluminum pie pan
- Root vegetables - carrot, turnip, radish, or beet; cut and keep top portion
- Soil
- Water

Purpose:
Did you know that some roots can be planted and will sprout into a whole new plant?

Instructions:
Punch a few small holes in the bottom of your dish, so that water can drain. Add a layer of soil about 2 inches deep and place tops of roots in the soil, with cut bottoms down. Leave about an inch of the leaf stem on top. To prevent rotting, let cut vegetables dry for 1-2 days before planting. Place your garden dish in a bright windowsill. Keep evenly moist but not too wet. Observe your garden every day. Soon, your root top garden will start to sprout new leaves from the top and new roots into the soil.

What they learn:
Explain to the children that Roots are a very important part of plants. Roots often help to anchor a plant in the soil and take up the water and nutrients needed for a plant to grow. As they observe the growth, talk with them open-endedly and encourage scientific questioning.
My Garden

Materials List:
- Chart paper
- Marker

Purpose:
To teach the children a new song about gardening!

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

What they learn:
When you introduce new songs, repetition is the best way to encourage the children to remember it. Songs are a great way to get an open-ended conversation about the subject going!

“My Garden”

This is my garden, I’ll plant it with care,
Here are the seeds I’ll plant in there,
The sun will shine,
The rain will fall,
The seeds will sprout and grow up tall.
My Garden Plan

Materials List:
• Pictures of vegetable gardens
• A variety of writing and drawing materials
• Graph paper
• Measuring tapes, rulers

Purpose:
Each day when your children get to work in the outdoor garden, it will be important that they help decide where things go and what things go in the garden. Allowing them to draw their own idea of what the garden should look like will be a great way to get them involved in the planning!

Instructions:
Place the materials in the block center and encourage the children to construct a garden plan. Talk to them about why measuring the distance between plants will be important and what ideas they have for the garden's construction.

What they learn:
Through this activity and the daily work in the garden, the children learn that their ideas are valued and important. They also learn that rewards often come after periods of waiting—not always instantly! Gardening is a great way to teach the concept of patience and diligence.
Materials List:
• A shoe box
• A variety of bulbs
• Paint
• Paper
• Scissors (teachers only)

Purpose:
To use an art medium other than sponges and brushes!

Instructions:
Cut the paper to the size of the base of the shoebox. Place a piece of paper in the bottom of the shoebox and squirt some paint into the box. Place a bulb or two in the box and cover the box securely. Allow the children to gently shake the box to make the bulb move around freely. As it moves, it will spread the paint and create a beautiful work of art! Hang the paintings up to dry and label them with each child’s name. Talk with the children about why this type of art is different!

What they learn:
Using different materials than those used every day encourages the children to think creatively and outside the brush!
There’s a Bulb in my Fridge!

Materials List:
• A variety of bulbs that have not sprouted
• Small container
• Refrigerator (real)

Purpose:
To introduce the idea that bulbs like the cold dark ground!

Instructions:
Explain to the children that bulbs like to “sleep” in the cold, dark ground during the winter before shooting up their sprouts in the springtime. Ask the children if they know of a cold dark place. Explain to them that you’re going to trick some bulbs by placing them in the refrigerator! Place the bulbs in the container and put them in the refrigerator. Leave them there for a few weeks before planting them in the ground this spring. This will give the bulbs a head start because they will think that winter has come and gone already!

What they learn:
This silly activity will teach the children one of the interesting facts about bulbs! Recall the activity from time to time and see if the children remember when you put the bulbs in the fridge.
A Seedling Greenhouse

(adapted from "Kids Garden")

Materials List:
• Milk carton
• Clear, plastic wrap
• Scissors (teachers only)
• Tape

Purpose:
To create a small, indoor greenhouse for some of the seedlings that you’ve started!

Instructions:
cut the top flaps of the carton and cut large windows in every side. Cover the top and side openings with clear plastic taped to the box. Set the small seedlings in the greenhouse and place it near a window.

What they learn:
This activity will allow the children to see first hand how a greenhouse works. Explaining to them that the greenhouse helps the plants get extra sun, warmth, and moisture will help deepen their understanding as they observe the young plants grow!
Materials List:
• Area large enough for the children to move
• Sticks gathered from outside
• Up-beat children’s song

Purpose:
To let the children gather their own musical instruments!

Instructions:
Take a short nature walk with the children and gather as many sticks and other potential “noisemakers” as possible! Bring them indoors and encourage them to tap and shake along with the music you’ve selected.

What they learn:
Creating their own noise is a great way for children to release energy and rid their bodies of stress, which is important for young children.
Plant Puzzles

Materials List:
• Pictures of plants
• Clear contact paper or laminating paper
• Scissors (teachers only)

Purpose:
To encourage fine motor development

Instructions:
Cover the picture with clear contact or laminating paper (front and back). Cut the picture into puzzle-like sections. Make the pieces as simple to match as you want. Place the puzzles in the block center and encourage the children to put the pictures back together.

What they learn:
Working puzzles encourages patience and the use of their emerging fine motor skills. Remember, some children might become frustrated and that’s ok.

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

Materials List:
• Plain, white t-shirts (donated or purchased)
• Fabric paint
• Newspaper
• Piece of cardboard

Purpose:
To allow the children to personalize their own shirt that they can wear when working in the garden!

Instructions:
Cover the table with newspaper and place the cardboard under the top layer of fabric in the shirt. Closely supervise and assist children in decorating a shirt with the fabric paint. They can put their name or a picture of something they want to do in the garden… the choices are unlimited! Allow the shirts to air-dry for at least 24 hours. They can be worn when working in the garden and washed as needed at the center, or sent home as a keepsake.

What they learn:
If you use them each time the children work in the garden, the will learn that just as they might have special “school” clothes, there are special garden clothes that you can wear!
Tea Time!

Materials List:
- Toy tea set
- Chart paper
- Marker

Purpose:
To encourage the children to think about what tea is made of.

Instructions:
Allow the children to play with the tea set freely. Observe their behavior. Talk with them about what kind of tea they are making. You might find that they don’t know what tea really is! Then use the marker and chart paper to write down some of their ideas and discuss with them that tea is often made from herbs that can be grown very easily!

What they learn:
If you extend this activity and teach them about herbs you will find that they might want to make some tea! You can certainly grow some herbs and make tea in your classroom as well. Mint, chamomile, and lemon balm are three herbs that make a great tea. They are easy to grow as long as they get lots of sun, either inside or out. To make tea, boil a pot of water and pour it over the herbs. Allow it to seep for 5-10 minutes and pour the mixture through a strainer. Allow the tea to cool before sampling with the children!
Terrarium

Materials List:
• Empty, clean, clear, 2-liter soda bottle
• Scissors (teachers only)
• Sterilized potting soil
• Pea gravel
• Ground charcoal
• Small, tropical plants
• Chopstick
• Plastic wrap

Purpose:
To create a complete ecosystem in a bottle!

Instructions:
Clean the bottle and cut off the top. Next, pour a layer of pea gravel in the bottom. Next, pour a small layer of ground charcoal (often found in pet supply shops) over the gravel. This creates the “drainage layer.” Pour 3 inches of potting soil over the first layer. Dig small holes in the mixture with the chopstick and place the small tropical plants in the holes. Water the terrarium after all the plants are in place. You can then cover the container with plastic wrap to seal in moisture.

What they learn:
This activity is pretty time consuming and may take a couple of days. When it is complete, it provides a close-up view of an ecosystem—complete with plants, soil, food, light, air and water!
Materials List:
• Chart paper
• Marker

Purpose:
To introduce one final song of the unit

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

What they learn:
This poem will tie together the theme of indoor gardening for the children!

“A Little Seed” by Dick Wilmes

I took a little seed one day
About a month ago.
I put it in a pot of dirt,
In hopes that it would grow.
I poured a little water
To make the soil right.
I set the pot upon the sill,
Where the sun would give it light.
I checked the pot most every day,
And turned it once or twice.
With a little care and water
I helped it grow so nice!
P.L.A.N.N.T. Preschoolers Learning About Nature & Nutrition Together-
A Garden-Enhanced Curriculum for 3-5 Year Olds

Manuals provided by:
Kentucky Department for Public Health, Obesity Prevention Partnership for a Fit Kentucky http://www.fitky.org

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