


The Garden Scoop

Before we discuss the basics of desert gardening in Part 2, we will describe the tools you need or might want to obtain as your garden project grows. We also include information on managing your children in the garden. These pointers have worked well for Master Gardeners who volunteer at school gardens.

Tools

 Your tool needs will depend on the number of children working in the garden at any one time, your budget and the magnitude of your program. While a minimum number of adult-sized tools are required for maintenance work and class activities, consider borrowing or renting all the tools necessary for initially digging and establishing the garden plots. You may not want to maintain and store all this equipment.

We know from experience that tool quality is important. Purchase the best possible tools, despite the greater expense. They will last longer and cost the program less in the long run. Yard sales and flea markets are possible sources for good used tools. Check out the short-handled and scaled-down versions for kids.

If you have few funds, you can still accomplish most of the gardening with the children with only hand trowels, a few buckets and a hose. Following is a list of tools that are useful to have if available:

- ❑ Trowels, small hand shovels used for transplanting and cultivating. These are the most frequently used tool by small children.



- ❑ Buckets for hauling soil, compost, weeds, harvests.
- ❑ Hoses, nozzles or watering cans for irrigation.
- ❑ Hoes for shallow digging, weeding, cultivating or mounding soil.
- ❑ Shovels for digging and scooping.
- ❑ Garden (bowed) rakes to level soil, remove rock and debris, spread fertilizer and amendments.
- ❑ Spading forks or pitchforks for cultivation and mixing compost, but *only* if children are under supervision.
- ❑ Leaf rakes to gather debris and leaves.
- ❑ Wheelbarrow or two-wheeled garden cart for hauling compost, soil, manure and other materials. The two-wheeled variety provides greater stability for children. A tarp can substitute with several children carrying it by the corners. A “little red wagon” works for small children.
- ❑ Pruning shears to cut flowers and shape plants. Scissors can also work, if they will make a clean cut.



Tending Your Class

There are as many approaches to managing garden activities as there are children. Storytelling, exchanging planting news, choosing activities or crops and eating your harvest can often be handled with the entire class. Many instructors, however, find it best to manage hands-on garden work in small groups of children, rather than managing 25 students individually doing the same activity. Students work collaboratively within their groups while the teacher roams between the rows or beds.

Unless there is adequate space in the garden and your volunteers are experienced with managing children, garden activities are probably best done in shifts of smaller groups rather than with the whole class. Having said this, we do admit to knowing a few experienced gardeners who regularly manage a full class in the field. The most important factor is your level of comfort: gardening should be a positive experience for everyone, including the adults involved. Don't attempt more than you think you can handle.

Setting forth a few basic rules for everyone to follow is advisable. We've listed a few suggestions below, but you may need to add others suited to your circumstances.



Garden Etiquette

- Walk on the pathways between the beds to avoid crushing plants or compacting soil.
- Ask before you pick anything.
- Harvest only from your own class plot.
- Wash everything before eating (school pesticide sprayings may have reached the garden).
- Keep tools out of paths to prevent tripping.
- Keep tools below the knees.
- Place sharp edges or points of tools face down.
- Clean tools before putting them away.
- Wash hands after gardening.



Tricks of the Trade

We've included a few helpful hints that Master Gardeners have used successfully when working with children. We're sure you'll develop some of your own ideas as you begin gardening.

- Collect frozen concentrate juice cans to distribute seeds and fertilizer to the children. Measure the appropriate amount in a can for each child. It saves time and helps prevent spills or seeds lost to the wind.
- Place a trellis flat on the prepared bed before planting. The grid pattern will help the students to space their seeds more evenly.
- Please don't use weeding as a punishment. It is a vital part of gardening and should not be viewed as a lowly task to be despised by all!
- Scrape any chunks of soil off tools with a trowel or putty knife. Dipping tools into a bucket of gritty sand also helps clean off clinging soil. After cleaning, trowels can be pushed into the sand until next used. This helps to prevent rust.



- ❑ Cut the top off a plastic milk jug and punch one tiny hole in the bottom with an ice pick. Place it near a plant and it becomes a drip system. Filling the jug with water is often easier for young children than watering carefully around the plant.
- ❑ Tie knots at equal intervals in a length of thin rope or twine. Stretch the rope across the planting bed. Students can use the knots to help space seeds correctly.
- ❑ Make your own seed tape using paper towels. Place *small* seeds at proper intervals on one strip of towel; cover with another strip. Moisten so seeds and towels will cling together. Place in a shallow trench and barely cover with soil. Seeds will not move around as you water the bed.

