



Classroom Management Tips

Resource Sheet

Teaching in an outdoor classroom is different than teaching in a traditional classroom environment. To make sure that your time in the garden is effective and enjoyable, here are a few tips on classroom management strategies in the school garden.

Have Help

If possible have as many adults as you can get—parents, school volunteers, para-professionals, older student mentors, etc. Ideally, there is one adult for every 10 students.

Set the Tone

Before going out to the garden, make your expectations for garden behavior clear. Use the same behavior management techniques in the garden that you use in the classroom. Explain that garden time is a privilege and anyone who violates it will have to remain inside to do other work. Explain that garden time is not recess, but an extension of class time.

Reinforce classroom learning—keep garden lessons relevant to what the students are learning in the classroom. The garden offers so many wonderful analogies to other aspects of life and learning.

The garden can be full of distractions; embrace these interruptions, as they are often teachable moments.

Emphasize the importance of respect—respect for the natural life cycles of plants and insects; respect for each other and the differences we all bring to the garden; respect for other gardeners' plots (e.g. do not walk on their plots, do not harvest their food).

Celebrate small successes with all students to help build their confidence and comfort level in the garden (e.g. Good teamwork! Way to get your hands dirty! Good job asking questions!).

Everyone Has a Task

Garden time is learning and work time, but make the gardening experience fun too with hands-on activities, games and playful competition (e.g. Who can pull out a weed with the longest root? Which group can chop the most compost?).

Provide structured learning in the garden. Have assigned tasks with clear step-by-step instructions.

Break the class into smaller more manageable groups and assign each group a task (e.g. planting different seeds, weeding, chopping compost, making signs and labels, building garden walkways).

Rotate groups every 10-15 minutes so all the students get exposure to everything and keep their attention and focus.

The Garden Classroom

Increase the students' sense of ownership by having them exposed to all parts of gardening—prepping the soil, building the compost, planting, weeding, tool maintenance. The focus of the school garden is on education rather than productivity.

Have clearly marked areas for foot traffic. Plants do not do well with compacted soil. Create footpaths between planting rows with hay, leaves or more creative ways such as painted rocks, concrete stepping stones, etc.

Do not expect students to create and maintain complex, densely planted gardens. Remember that the real learning and experience for children in the garden comes from the process and small steps to success. Gardening should model healthy lifestyles and not perfectly manicured spaces.

Use signage throughout the garden:

- Label all seeds and transplants with names and dates planted. You can use plant labels from your garden store or make your own by cutting up a recycled plastic container (e.g. milk jugs, yogurt containers).
- Have students build and paint colorful signs labeling plants or welcoming people into the garden.

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