

Local Learning

Activities in Exploring Organic Gardening

Kelmarna Gardens Farm Education Programme

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Session 1: Plant Needs & Seeds

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This session is comprised of three lessons and a total of ten activities. Each lesson is designed to meet certain learning *objectives* and each activity is organised into three sections: **1) predict**, to encourage critical thinking and the formation of hypotheses; **2) investigate**, to take action and interact with the topic; and **3) reflect**, to interpret, analyse and evaluate experience for greater understanding.

In our activities, we strive to inspire curiosity, enjoyment and stewardship in caring for our environment. We hope that by showing the fun, intrigue and rewards of gardening, we can encourage our students to reflect on the experiences they share, to retain the lessons they've learned, to explore and discover on their own and to become more invested in the health of their environment.

Lesson 1.1: What do plants need to grow?

Objectives

- Students will identify and describe the five basic needs of plants
- Students will use critical thinking and interpersonal awareness concepts to relate the needs of other living organisms
- Students will use science, mathematics, language and visual arts skills to identify and describe the role and impact of the five basic needs of plants

In this section, we will take inventory of what your students know about plants, what they think plants need to grow and discuss their reasoning why.

Prompt your students to think about and discuss what plants need to live and thrive to help demonstrate that plants are living organisms with needs similar even to our own. In this way, we can help students to develop a deeper awareness, understanding and appreciation for plants as living organisms. What needs do we have in common with plants? What are some key differences?

Using the activities below, guide your students to identify and describe these five primary needs:

Soil	Sun	Water	Air	Care
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Activity A: Soil

Plants grow in soil, where they stretch their roots, make their home and access the food they need. Healthy soil is made up of four main ingredients:

- a) *minerals* – tiny particles of rock, like sand and clay
- b) *organic matter* – worms, microscopic organisms and nutritious decay of past living things
- c) *air* – flowing through tiny spaces called *pores*, to allow soil ecology to *respire*, or breathe
- d) *water* – soaking into the soil to keep the soil ecology *hydrated*

Predict: Discuss with your students what they know about soil. What is in soil? Are there any living things in the soil? If they were to dig a hole what do they expect to find in the soil? What should 'healthy' soil look like? Record some of their ideas to review later.

Investigate: Prompt your students to look more closely at the trees and plants around school, home or their neighbourhood. What kind of soil are they living in? Pick one or more spots to dig for a closer look. Prompt them to think about and record the conditions of the soil. Is it moist and fluffy? Or is it dry and compact? How do the conditions of the soil change their expectations for what they will find?

Next, have your students dig a small hole. What can they see in the soil? Does it look healthy? If you can, use a magnifying glass or zoom in with a digital camera to get an even closer look and even take pictures to review later.

Reflect: Have your students analyse and record their findings by drawing and writing about what they see in the soil. Did they see anything moving? What was the condition of the soil below as compared to the surface?

For older or more curious students, use photos or their drawings to help identify any organisms they discovered. How many kinds of organisms did they find? Was there more or less activity in the wet or dry soil samples?

Finally, have your students compare their findings with their initial expectations. Did they discover anything surprising? What have they learned?

Activity B: Sun

Plants get energy from the sun by using their *foliage*, or leaves, to soak in *sunlight* and combine it with *water* and *carbon dioxide* from the air. Through a process called **photosynthesis**, this mixture allows plants to create food for themselves and to return oxygen back into the air that humans and animals need to breathe.

Predict: Discuss with your students what they know about plants and their relationship with sunlight. Why do plants need sunlight? What do they think would happen if a plant didn't get any sunlight? In what ways can plants grow to maximise their exposure to sunlight? Record some of their ideas to review later.

Investigate: Prompt your students to look more closely at the trees and plants around school, home or their neighbourhood. Can they find any evidence that the leaves, flowers or branches are reaching for sunlight? What shapes have the plants grown into and why?

Next, either assign or have your students pick an interesting tree or plant to examine. Take pictures if you can or have them draw the basic structure of the plant. Make sure they also take note of where the sun is relative to the plant. Then, have them analyse and label parts of the plant that they can see evidence of it reaching for sunlight. This can be seen in features such as the twisting of branches, bunching of leaves or the overall posture of the plant. It may be simplest to find a tree or group of trees that have grown into interesting shapes due to the shade of neighbouring trees or buildings.

Reflect: Have your students analyse and record their findings by drawing and writing about what they observed about the tree or plant. What kinds of shapes and structures did they see? How can they tell that the plant had grown in that way due to the need for sunlight?

If you plan to grow plants at school or at home, you can continue this activity over time by keeping track of how your plant grows and changes in reaction to the sun. Seedlings and young plants will be especially mobile in shifting their structure to face the sun. 24 hours, or once a day, is usually a decent enough interval to see a change in most infant plants.

Finally, have your students compare their findings with their initial expectations. Did they discover anything surprising? What have they learned?

Activity C: Water

plants need water to stay healthy and **hydrated**, just like we do! Water is essential for them to grow bigger, process nutrients and grow their essential parts such as leaves, flowers and seeds. Plants don't *perspire*, or sweat, like we do, but they do lose water from their leaves in a similar kind of 'sweating' process called **transpiration**.

Predict: Discuss with your students what they know about plants and their relationship with water. They have likely seen a plant given water, maybe a school field with water sprinklers or their neighbourhood trees after a decent rainfall. Why do plants need water? How do plants use water? What do they think would happen if a plant didn't get enough water? Record some of their ideas to review later.

Investigate: Prompt your students to take a moment the next time they bite into a fruit or vegetable to think how wet and juicy it is inside. If you can, provide them with examples like cucumber or apple slices. Grapes and raisins are also good examples to compare hydrated and dehydrated states. Where does all that water come from?

Next, have your students pick or gather at least a couple of leaves or flowers and bring them inside. Keep some of them with their stems in water, like flowers in a vase. Keep the rest out of water, like in a bowl or other container. Have your students observe these leaves and flowers over time and keep a record of what they see. What happens to each leaf or flower? How do they react differently when that have water or not?

Reflect: Have your students analyse and record their findings by drawing and writing about what they observed at different stages of the experiment. What reaction did they see in the watered and dry groups? What might this tell them about why a plant needs water and how it uses it?

Finally, have your students compare their findings with their initial expectations. Did they discover anything surprising? What have they learned?

Activity D: Air

Plants need air to *respire*, or breathe, just like we do! In fact, plants complement our respiration by using the opposite components of air. During photosynthesis, plants use *carbon dioxide* and return *oxygen* back into the air while animals and insects use *oxygen* and return *carbon dioxide* to the air. This is a great example of interconnectedness and how in nature waste is a matter of perspective.

Air also helps to manage temperature and water through the movement of wind, the process or *evaporation*, when water is pulled into the air and *precipitation*, or when that moisture is returned to the ground in events like rain or snow. Structures like *shade houses* or *glass houses* can help us control the movement of air to trap just the right amount of heat, moisture and gas for our plants.

Predict: Discuss with your students what they know about plants and their relationship with air. Have them focus on their breathing and think about how we breathe even without focusing on it. Discuss the phrase 'fresh air' and what it means to them. By any chance are plants, trees or the outdoors related to this idea? Why is that? Why do plants need air? Do plants breathe? How do plants use air? What do they think would happen if a plant didn't have fresh air? Record some of their ideas to review later.

Investigate: Prompt your students to think about how we can tell if a plant is breathing. Have your students carefully pick at least a couple of fresh leaves off a nearby tree. In a bowl or waterproof container, submerge the leaves in lukewarm water. Make sure they sit just below the surface of the water by weighing them down with small objects such as stones from outside, paperweights or other handy items around the classroom or your home. Then place the container in the sunlight and wait for two to three hours.

Have your students look closely and record what they see at the beginning. This exercise requires patience for the leaves to demonstrate the desired effect. You can leave the experiment, move on to something else or take a break and come back to it later.

Return to the experiment in about two hours' time, and hopefully you will be able to see that small air bubbles have formed on the leaves. These bubbles are small pockets of oxygen that the leaf has 'exhaled' or 'burped' out. Since you picked the leaves fresh from a living plant, you caught it in the

process of *respiration* and *photosynthesis*. Discuss with your students where they think these bubbles came from and what it tells us about how plants breathe.

Reflect: Have your students analyse and record their findings by drawing and writing about what they observed when they returned to the experiment. What did they see forming on the leaves? How did it get there? What might this tell them about why plants need air and how they use it?

Finally, have your students compare their findings with their initial expectations. Did they discover anything surprising? What have they learned?

Activity E: Care

This last 'need' is particularly important for gardens. Of course, plants can get along just fine without our help. However, by taking the initiative to grow plants in designated places with specific goals and expectations, it becomes our responsibility to care for those plants in a way that will make them most effective. This means making sure that the other four needs are met in your garden.

One important element of caring for plants in a garden is keeping your plants and your space safe from *weeds* and *pests*. This means removing or deterring unwanted plants and harmful animals or insects away from your garden.

For organic gardens, good care also means helping the garden care for itself. Mimicking natural processes helps to lessen our workload working with nature as our ally. You will learn more about these concepts and strategies as we move forward in our sessions.

Predict: Discuss with your students what they know about caring for plants. Draw on their knowledge and experience with the other four 'needs' activities to help inform what they can do to provide for a garden. What do plants need? How can we care for a garden to meet these needs? What are some ways that organic gardeners encourage the garden to look after itself? Make a list of their ideas for proper garden care.

Next, prompt your students to think about a garden at school, home or that they have visited before. What do they think would happen to that garden if no one cared for it? With no care, what would happen after a couple of days? How about after a few weeks? Or a whole year? Record some of their ideas to review later.

Now, have your students draw an area of a garden. If you can, choose a specific section of your school, home or neighbourhood that you can neglect in the coming days and weeks. Otherwise, the students can imagine their own garden. Then, have your students draw at least two more versions of the same garden at future intervals and after a lack of care. For example, the second drawing can be the garden after two weeks and the third picture after four weeks with no care. How will their pictures reflect the state of the garden? What do they expect to see if they leave the garden alone?

Investigate: Draw from images online to show examples of what gardens look like after they have been neglected over time. If you can, have your students check in periodically on the section of school, home or neighbourhood that they chose to draw. How does that space change over time?

Reflect: Have your students analyse and record their findings by drawing and writing about what they observe at different intervals over time or what is depicted in the online examples you use. What changes do they see in the garden? What might this tell them about how garden care impacts the outcomes of a garden?

Finally, have your students compare their findings with their initial expectation drawings. Did they discover anything surprising? What have they learned?

Lesson 1.2: Starting with Seeds

Objectives

- Students will repurpose household items for practical purposes in the garden
- Students will use statistics, motor skills and living world concept to identify and categorise different features and varieties of seeds
- Students will describe and demonstrate how to effectively sow seeds into soil

Activity F: Homemade Plant Pots

Instead of buying new plant pots, here are a few ways to recycle old materials to serve as plant pots.

Predict: Prompt your students to think about materials around school or home that they could repurpose as plant pots. What are some basic design features of a plant pot? How do certain materials suit these requirements? Record some of their ideas to review later.

Investigate: The examples in this activity will be for using old newspaper, egg cartons, yogurt pottles and fruit punnets.

- **Newspaper Pot**

You will need old newspaper and a glass jar or cup. Fold the newspaper into a long rectangle that is taller than the height of your jar. Pre-fold (fold and then unfold) about two centimetres along the long side facing the top of the jar. Then roll the newspaper all the way around the jar to create a tube with the extra length sticking out past the bottom of the jar. Fold this excess paper over the base of the jar to create the bottom of your pot and then pull the paper pot off the jar. Now fold the pre-folded top rim of the pot into itself to create a sturdier structure. Fill the paper pot with soil and there you have it!

An advantage of this pot is that the newspaper is **biodegradable**, which means you can plant this one straight into the ground and the paper will decay and disappear into the soil over time!

- **Egg Carton Pot**

You will need an old egg carton and a pen or knife. Carefully use the pen or the knife to poke holes in the bottom of each egg cup. Since each cup is so small, you will only need one hole for drainage. Some egg cartons already have holes at the base of each cup. You can then carefully cut away each cup to separate them into individual pots, or you can leave the carton together to serve as a seed tray. Fill the cups with soil and there you have it!

An advantage of this pot is that each egg carton has multiple cups for sowing seeds into. You can use this method as a seed tray or a resource to quickly make many pots. Plus, like the newspaper, egg cartons are often **biodegradable**, which means you can plant the cups straight into the ground as well!

- **Yogurt Pottle Pot**

You will need an old, clean plastic yogurt pottle and a pen or knife. Carefully use the pen or the knife to poke holes in the bottom of the pottle. For single serving pottles you only need one or two holes, but for larger and pint-sized containers you will need to poke more. These holes will serve as important drains for water to soak through the soil and out the bottom. Fill the pottle with soil and there you have it!

An advantage of this pot is that you can reuse plastic containers that you already have rather than throwing them out or buying more!

- **Fruit Punnet Pot**

You will need an old, clean plastic fruit punnet and a pair of scissors. Carefully cut the lid off the fruit punnet. Since it should already have drainage hole in the bottom, simply fill the punnet with soil and there you have it! An advantage of this pot is that it's one of the quickest and easiest to create!

Reflect: Have your students analyse and record their experience by drawing and writing about their creative process for making these plant pots. Do they have these materials at home? How do these craft activities help us reframe what we might consider 'waste' items?

Have your students compare their experience with some of the other materials and ideas they considered at the beginning. Can they make plant pots using some of those ideas? How can they manipulate other materials to create something practical and creative? What have they learned?

Activity G: Sorting Seeds

Guide your students to explore a variety of seeds and to sort them according to identifiable features such as size, shape, colour, variety and so on.

Predict: Discuss with your students what they know about seeds. What is a seed? Why are seeds so important? How can they tell that something is a seed? What are some features of seeds that make them recognisable? Record some of their ideas to review later.

Investigate: Introduce your students to a mixed variety of different seeds. It is best to use as many different sizes, shapes and colours of seeds as you can manage. These can be purchased in seed packets, collected from outside or taken from your kitchen pantry in the form of dried beans, nuts and other edible seeds.

Have your students think about and practice different methods for identifying, counting and sorting the seeds. This can be by size, shape, colour, texture, or any other identifiable feature that they can recognise and describe. You can use tools such as small spoons, tweezers, old ice block sticks or other utensils to help handle the seeds in addition to small bowls, recycled egg cartons or other container to help group the seeds into categories.

Reflect: Have your students analyse and record their findings by drawing and writing about the different features they recognise and the different ways they sort their seeds. What features do the seeds all have in common? What were some interesting differences between them? Which you're your favourite and what plants will they grow into? What might your observations tell us about seed and their importance?

Finally, have your students compare their findings with their initial expectation drawings. Did they discover anything surprising? What have they learned?

Activity H: Sowing Seeds

Guide your students to plant seeds they have chosen into the plant pots they have created in the previous activities.

A general rule for figuring out the proper depth at which to sow a seed is ***twice the width of the seed***. This means that the appropriate depth will depend on the size of the seed. For garlic cloves or larger beans, this means they can be planted upwards of the length of a young student's thumb, whereas for capsicum or coriander it will be only ever be just below the surface of the soil.

You can choose seeds based on size, season or preferred variety. It is best to practice this activity with a variety of seeds so students can practice applying this rule to seeds of differing shapes and sizes.

$$\text{SOWING DEPTH} = \text{SEED WIDTH} \times 2$$

Predict: Whatever seeds you choose, discuss with your students about the type of plants they will be growing and what kind of foods they will produce. Prompt them to consider how they should plant their seed into the soil. How deep should we sow our seeds? Should we treat all seeds the same? What might happen if we sow a seed too deep or too shallow? Why?

Also prompt your students to imagine how their seeds will emerge and grow moving forward. What will the baby plant look like when it pops out of the soil? How long will it take to grow? Record some of their ideas and consider making prediction drawings to review later.

Investigate: Guide your students to sow the seeds according to the rule above. For younger students, you can have them compare their seed to parts of their hands or fingers. For example, some seeds may be closer to the size of a fingernail, a knuckle length or an entire finger length depending on the type of seed and age of your students. For older students you can have them use tools to measure and calculate the appropriate depth relative to their seeds.

You may also create examples that demonstrate 'incorrect' seed sowing technique. For example, you can plant a small seed far too deeply (lack of sunlight) or a larger seed right on the surface of the soil (potential to wash away). You can then discuss with your students why these might not work and even observe them over time to track their progress as compared to your 'correctly' sown ones.

Once the seeds have been sown, revisit the list of things that plants need to survive. What do we now need to provide in order to care for our seeds to make sure they grow into healthy plants?

Prompt the student to water their seeds and assign them the task of finding a decent spot at school or in their home where they have fresh air, plenty of sunlight and are easy to access. The pots need to be easy enough to reach so that, for one, the students don't forget about them, and two, so they can continue to give water and other forms of care as well as keep an eye on their progress.

Reflect: Have your students analyse and record their observations by drawing and writing about what they see of their seed's progress over time. How long did it take before you noticed any change? What did your plant look like as it emerged from the ground?

For younger students, their monitoring can be as simple as a drawing update once every few days, and for older students it can mean keeping track of more minute details such as when and how often they water the pot, measuring how much water they give, making detailed drawings or journal entries of the progress they see and taking measurements of the seedling as it grows.

Finally, have your students compare their findings with their initial expectations. Each step of this ongoing process you may encourage your students to feel comfortable adjusting or making new predictions and to compare their observations with their earlier predictions. Are they discovering anything surprising? What are they learning?

Lesson 1.3: Into the Garden

Objectives

- Students will use science and mathematics concepts to demonstrate how to effectively prepare an environment for gardening
- Students will describe and demonstrate how to effectively transfer seedlings from pots into the ground

Activity I: Transplanting your Seedlings

In this section we will consider what elements we need to plan for when preparing a space to plant a garden. Every plant is different when it comes to specific needs. Some plants aren't very picky and don't mind squeezing in, while others prefer to be much more on their own, whether due to their size or appetite for pulling nutrients and moisture from the soil.

It is essential that you research whatever plant variety you want to propagate in order to determine the best conditions for your seedling. The following are a few important elements to consider when planting a garden:

growing season	nutrition needs	hydration needs	sunlight exposure
size at maturity	associated insects	harvest method	maintenance needs

Don't worry too much about all of these for the moment. We will learn more about why and how to consider these elements later in our sessions.

For this activity, focus your students' attention to determining proper *spacing* between their plants to help make sure that they have enough room to grow and are not overly competitive with their neighbours for resources.

Predict: Prompt your students to think about how far apart they should plant their seedlings in the garden. What are some factors they need to consider? The plant is small now, but how big will it become? What size and shape will it grow into and how will this impact its neighbours? As it grows will it have enough access to all five of the primary needs of plants?

Help your students to contextualise this exercise by having them think specifically about their seedling and the type of plant that they know it will become. How do they imagine their plant will grow and change between now and then? What kind of food will it produce? Do they think it will need more or less of certain needs than other plants? Record some of their ideas and consider making prediction drawings to review later.

Investigate: Provide your students with the proper spacing measurements for their plants or assign them the task of researching that information for themselves. For younger students, you can have them use a measuring tape to compare their spacing requirements with parts of their body. For example, they can measure the length of their hands, feet or forearms to approximate distances of between 5 centimetres and 25 centimetres, depending on the age of your students. For older students you can have them use more advanced tools or different creative methods to measure and calculate the appropriate distances between seedlings.

You may also create examples that demonstrate 'incorrect' planting distances. For example, you can plant two potentially large plants too close together (overcrowding), you can plant two potentially small plants too far apart (unused space) or you can plant one potentially large and one potentially small plant next to each other to see how they compete (suppression). You can then discuss with your students why these arrangements might not work and even observe them over time to track their progress as compared to your 'correctly' spaced ones.

Regarding transplanting, have the students create a small hole deep and wide enough for the seedling and give it some water. Guide your students to handle the seedling carefully with both hands and avoid pulling the stem or tearing roots. Help the roots acclimate to their new home by loosening the soil around them and dousing them with a bit of water before they go into the ground.

Once the seedlings have been transplanted, revisit the list of things that plants need to survive. What do we now need to provide in order to care for our seeds to make sure they grow into healthy plants?

Prompt the student to water their transplanted seedlings. Then create a schedule or simply assign them the task of continuing to keep their plants watered, cared for as well as keep an eye on their progress.

Reflect: Have your students analyse and record their observations by drawing and writing about what they see of their plant's progress over time. How long did it take before they noticed any change? How has your plant grown and changed? Are the leaves the same shape? Is it the same colour?

For younger students, their monitoring can be as simple as a drawing update once every few days, and for older students it can mean keeping track of more minute details such as when and how often they water the pot, measuring how much water they give, making detailed drawings or journal entries of the progress they see and taking measurements of the garden as it grows.

Finally, have your students compare their findings with their initial expectations. Each step of this ongoing process you may encourage your students to feel comfortable adjusting or making new predictions and to compare their observations with their earlier predictions. Are they discovering anything surprising? What are they learning?

Bonus Activity 1: Garden Yoga – Plant Life Cycle

Objectives

- Students will participate in movement, physical development and dramatic sequences that relate to the life cycle of plants
 - Students will use creativity and movement to experiment with developing their own sequences that demonstrate aspects of natural cycles in the garden
- 1) **Seed Pose** – prompt your students to imagine that they are a seed in the ground. Seated or laying on the floor, have them grab their knees into their chest to form a tight ball
 - 2) **Watering the Seeds** – speak about the importance of water in the garden. Go around randomly to each student and pretend to ‘water’ the ‘seeds’. Tap each student on the head to represent watering the soil they are resting in. Once a ‘seed’ has been ‘watered’, that student can begin to ‘sprout’ and slowly release their legs, stretch out wide on the floor and raise their hands into the air.
 - 3) **Sprout Pose** – prompt your students to imagine that they are a baby plant, or sprout, beginning to grow out of the soil. Have them stand up slowly and drop their hands to their side in a relaxed standing pose.
 - 4) **Soaking in the Sunshine** – speak about the importance of sunlight in the garden. Prompt your students to close their eyes, stretch their arms to the side and tilt their heads back to the sunlight while taking a deep breath. Guide them to relax and enjoy the warmth of the sunlight and imagine they are like plants soaking in all the energy from the sun to grow big and strong.
 - 5) **Watering the Sprouts** – speak about the importance of water in the garden. Go around randomly again to ‘watering’ the sprouts. This time tap a few times around each student’s feet to represent watering their ‘roots’ in the soil. Have the students wiggle from their toes all the way up to the tops of their heads to represent drinking up water and nutrients from the soil. Once a ‘sprout’ has been ‘watered’, that student can begin to slowly raise their arms above their head as they wiggle into the next pose.
 - 6) **Blossom Pose** – prompt your students to imagine that they have grown into a beautiful blooming flower with big, bright petals. Have them slowly open their eyes, smile as broadly as they can and reach up high into the sky while stretching their fingers out wide.
 - 7) **Choosing a Colour** – go around the class or group and ask each student their favourite colour. They can now imagine that this is the colour of their ‘flower’. Prompt them to look around the group and imagine their friends as a beautiful and diverse patch of colourful flowers.
 - 8) **Visiting Pollinators** – speak about the role of bees in the garden. Bees visit flowers to collect *nectar* and spread *pollen* so that plants can grow *seeds* and *reproduce*. Go around randomly making a ‘buzzing’ sound like a bee and ‘pollinate’ each ‘flower’ by giving each student an enthusiastic double high-five to their hands outstretched overhead. Once a ‘flower’ has been ‘pollinated’, that student can begin to slowly lower each finger and then each arm as they lose petals and ‘wilt’ into the next pose.

- 9) **Spreading Seeds** – prompt your students to imagine that they are getting older and more tired. Have them slowly close each hand, one finger at a time, to represent losing their blossoms. Once their hands are curled into fists, prompt them to clutch their fists tightly and imagine that they are creating new seeds. Go around randomly and tap each student’s fists to indicate that their seeds are ready to drop. Have the students toss their imaginary seeds down onto the soil so they can grow into new plants next season. Once a ‘flower’ has dropped their ‘seeds’, that student can continue to ‘wilt’ by slowly bending over and trying to touch their toes
- 10) **Returning to the Soil** – speak about how plants can break down to give their nutrients back to the soil. As the students are stretching to reach their toes, prompt them to imagine they are getting more and more tired and their bodies heavier and heavier. Have them bend their knees and sink further until they are sitting or lying back on the floor. Guide them to relax, lay back and stretch out as they imagine that their flower has dried up and decomposed back into the soil to help the next lot of seeds grow big and strong in the future!