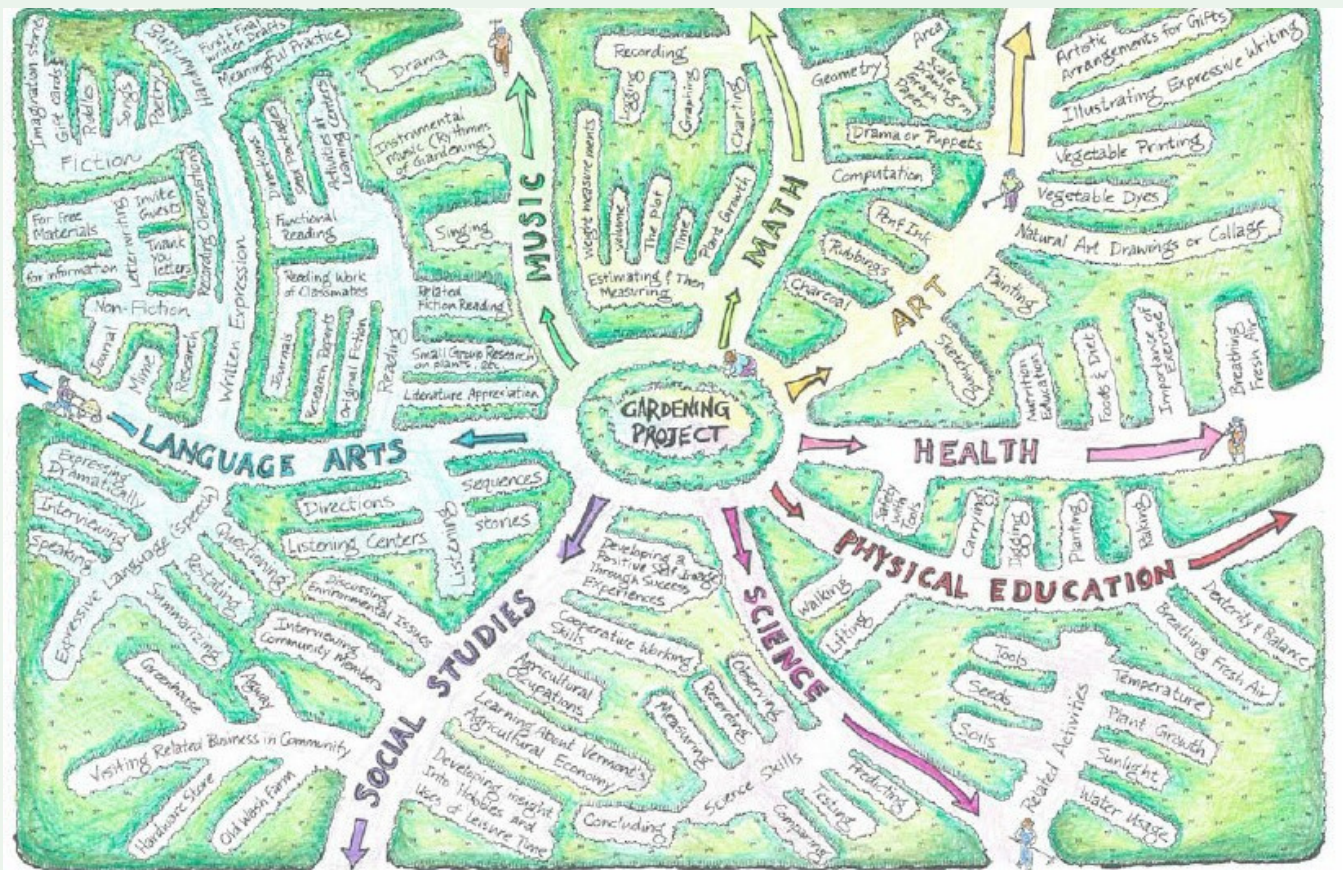


LEARNING IN THE GARDEN

IDEAS FOR INSPIRATION

BACKGROUND: If you have a school food garden, you may be wondering how to use this wonderful resource as a learning tool for your students. Outdoor activities in the garden connect students to the world using some of the most fundamental human experiences, such as using the senses and hunger! Gardening can integrate multidisciplinary education and offers something for all ages and stages of development. These lessons can contribute to a better understanding of wide-ranging topics such as biology, economics, ecology, evolution, globalization, environmental awareness, subsistence farming, and climate.

The garden is a great place to play and learn. Investigate anything and everything! What is a harvest moon? What are the Fibonacci numbers and what do they have to do with plants? The garden is a place for boundless study and inspiration. All year long, even in the heart of winter, we can be learning from nature and making observations in the garden. The garden is a wonderfully wholesome starting place for many subjects and ways to learn about humans, nature, and our place in the universe.





IDEAS FOR INSPIRATION

Plan a year in the garden with your students. This is an interdisciplinary learning experience, from cooking plans to math about yield and calculating area. Draw a garden map, and discuss what vegetables you want to eat, and what you will make with your produce. This activity is best undertaken as soon as there are signs of spring, such as the Equinox on March 21st. This is a great time to look forward to a “last frost date” which is used to determine when to start planting seeds outdoors. You can also start growing your seedlings indoors!

Track garden growth. Use a garden journal to keep track of your garden progress. Measure the plants as they grow. Count or weigh each harvest. These routine activities can be lessons in estimation, math, plant biology, and other important lessons about farming and food sovereignty. Try setting up a birdcam or routine photography to track the progress of the garden through the seasons, and share on social media or in a newsletter.

Play in the garden, as well as do the work. This is a time for exploration and discovery. Student-led inquiry may lead to new lesson ideas. As the possibilities grow with the warming weather, you could start to designate one period each week to the garden. Perhaps it will be possible or necessary to assign garden or seedling care as a chore for students. Learning to be a producer, as well as consumer, is fundamental for youth.

Plan for succession. What happens to the garden when students are dismissed for the summer holidays? Secure volunteers on an ongoing basis to maintain a fruitful garden rooted in the community.

Celebrate your garden’s success with an annual event such as a harvest meal, barbecue, corn boil, pumpkin carving, or other event. This can be combined with a work party to “put the garden to bed” and prepare for the dormant season. It’s helpful to have photos of the journey to document the hard work and to thank volunteers, parents, teachers and students. Gardening is a great example of continuous learning. Every season we build more knowledge!