

Physical development – How gardening activities support the development of gross and fine motor skills

Gardening activities give children lots of opportunities to develop and practise their gross and fine motor skills

Gardening is a life skill that all children should have the opportunity to enjoy. Gardening activities give children lots of opportunities to develop and practise their gross and fine motor skills including hand-eye coordination and building physical strength. Gardening also helps children to connect with the natural environment, contributes to the development of positive feelings of well-being and to maintaining a healthy weight.

Some children will come to your setting having already experienced gardening activities at home but others will have had little experience. **Use your own judgement to plan activities that are suitable for each child as they progress from mastering simple actions to more complex ones.**

	Skill progression	Experiences to support development at this stage
Beginning...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digging in soil • Transporting soil • Watering plants in large pots/beds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a separate digging area so that children can practice with tools and techniques, for example, using different sized scoops and spades to dig large and small holes. Provide large flowerpots for children to fill and empty. • Encourage children to transport soil around by providing spades of different sizes, buckets to lift and carry and small wheelbarrows to push and pull. • Provide watering cans for filling, pouring, and carrying and encourage gross motor movements as children water large areas of garden. • Provide an environment which encourages children to practice balance by moving their bodies across uneven surfaces, grass and paths, sand and soil.
Then Moving On...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scooping soil to fill small pots • Planting seeds and plants • Watering with more precision • Picking flowers and vegetables 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer child sized hand tools e.g. trowels, as well as a variety of large and small spoons for filling compartments in seed trays requiring more precise movements and control. • Large seeds are easy and enjoyable for children to handle but also introduce challenge by encouraging children to pick up and sprinkle tiny seeds over the surface of the soil. • Provide pump action spray bottles for children to fill and control to gently mist small plants and seedlings. • Encourage careful picking of flowers and vegetables and provide small scissors for snipping herbs.
To More Complex Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replanting and repotting, pruning and weeding • Deadheading flowers, gathering seeds • Planning of a large planter or a veg/herb/flower bed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide regular sustained time for children to become deeply engaged with the process of gardening as they further develop their coordination and control in using a widening range of tools effectively. • Provide string and plant supports e.g. canes, for children to practice training and tying in tall plants and shoots. • With adult support children at this stage may enjoy making simple planters from wood, an activity which will provide opportunities for them to further develop both their gross and fine motor skills. • Provide books, magazines and access to online resources and encourage children to research herbs/vegetables/flowers that they would like to grow.

Stories about gardens and growing

- Eddie's Garden by Sarah Garland
- Growing Vegetable Soup by Lois Ehlert
- Jasper's Beanstalk by Nick Butterworth
- One Mole Digging a Hole by Julia Donaldson
- Oliver's Fruit Salad by Alison Barlett
- The Tiny Seed by Eric Carle

Easy to grow fruit, vegetables and flowers

- Strawberries
- Tomatoes
- Peas
- Lettuces
- Radishes
- Pumpkins
- Sunflowers
- Marigolds
- Nasturtiums

Home learning ideas

- Set up a growing challenge - How many tomatoes can you grow? or Who can grow the biggest pumpkin?
- Set up gardening bags and send children home with seeds, a related story, and gardening tools.

Useful websites

RHS – Children: Getting them interested in gardening:

www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=682

Cbeebies – Tips for gardening with children:

www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/grownups/7-tips-for-gardening-with-children

Community Playthings article - Gardening with children:

www.communityplaythings.com/resources/articles/2020/gardening-with-young-children

Food for Life Get Togethers are regular community activities that connect people from all ages and backgrounds through growing, cooking and eating good food. A free toolkit for early years practitioners on how to grow vegetables with children is available at:

www.fflgettogethers.org/get-involved/plant-and-share-month-for-early-years/