

# Planning Your Garden With Your Students

Or at least some suggestions

**Brainstorming:** Have students imagine what they want their garden to look like, smell like, feel like. What do they want to do in there? What do they want to eat from there? What do they want to see growing? You can have them write or draw about it, or just have them close their eyes and do guided imagery for them and let them see the garden with their "minds eye".

**Decision making:** Once everyone has ideas, decisions must be made about what seeds and plants will be ordered. Some suggestions for making those decisions democratically:

- divide the garden up by space and assign small groups to plan their garden space. Give each group a list of plants to choose from to ensure that you won't have repeats.
- create a frequency chart. Go through the alphabet and ask students for plants that they want to grow that start with A,B etc. Have everyone that wants to grow that plant raise their hands. Have a student keep track and put this information onto a frequency chart. The results can be tallied and graphed and the most popular plants can be chosen to be grown.
- Just take suggestions and create a list and plant a few of everything on the list that's possible to plant. This is for those of us who just can't say no to any child's request to plant obscure or unpopular vegetables.

**Seed Count:** In order to make sure that you are allocating your seed resource money well, and to solidify the garden plan in everyone's head, I really recommend doing a seed count. This involves planning out where everything will go in the garden and how much space each plant will need. Remember to count enough seeds to effectively plant; sometimes you want to overestimate to be able to put two seeds per hole, or to thickly seed a row of carrots.

**Some suggestions for doing a seed count:**

- Give kids scale maps of the garden divided by grids. Give them specifics on how much space each plant needs. Have them use scale measurements and rulers on the paper to determine how many seeds they will need.
- Mark the actual size of the garden on the floor of the classroom, hallway or gymnasium in blue painter's tape. Let them use real measurements to determine how many plants will fill the space and how many seeds they will need.
- Go out to the garden and mark it off with string or draw grid lines by drizzling lines of white flour on the dirt, or use colored yarn or squirt bottles with tempera solution in them to mark grids in the snow. Have students use real measurements to figure out their seed needs.
- Whatever you do, have them make maps of the final plan that they can use when actual planting time comes around.

**Once the count is in:**

- When you have your seed count, students can write letters soliciting donations to seed companies and local garden stores. There will probably be some things that you will want to buy from garden stores instead of ordering, like plant starts.
- It can also be helpful if each student or group of students is assigned one plant to become an expert on, and they can be in charge of the planting and care of those plants at planting time and throughout the rest of the school year.

**Next steps:**

In March it will be time to start seedlings of things like tomatoes, peppers and eggplant. You might want to start looking for seed trays and potting soil and thinking about where you can keep seedling trays. We'll go over seed starting in our next training.