



# Garden Classroom Management

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## *Classroom Management Strategies*

Rightfully so, school gardens may initially intimidate teachers who are used to walls, ceilings, chairs, and other decor of a classical school classroom. Yet, with the proper strategies and approaches, students can be organized and engaged--arguably even more effectively than in traditional classrooms. Here are some basic strategies we've found helpful.

### **Garden Agreements**

Set up a standard garden orientation program for your students, ideally the first time you meet in the garden. It's best if you can create specific rules for using garden tools, as well as set expectations for garden agreements. Agreements can be painted on a board or wooden pallet once students agree on them.

- Allow students to have ownership over the agreements--these should be 3 to 8 short phrases that are simple, easy to remember and effectively define proper garden behaviors
  - How do we want to feel when we are in the garden?
    - E.g. safe, inspired, peaceful, etc.
  - How can we act to feel that way?
  - How do we treat the garden? Insects? Tools?
    - You can also take time to demonstrate to students proper and improper use of tools
  - Establish consequences for when they outstep these agreements
    - E.g. "Cool off" for 5 minutes
  - Phrase the rules positively and try to keep them simple
    - E.g. "Walk in the garden" vs. "No running in the garden"
  - The fewer the better

### **Routines and Rituals**

Routines and rituals create a culture so students know what to expect when they enter the garden. Routines and rituals begin to define what would otherwise be a nebulous experience.

- Define how students will enter the garden, such as lining up outside the garden gate as a class before filing in, instead of running in when they get there.
- Provide time in the beginning of garden time to give students a chance to explore changes in the garden since their last visit--this way, they can be less distracted when it comes time for a lesson.
- Use activities or scavenger hunts to guide and structure garden exploration time, keeping it constructive and creative.

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- Sit in a circle or semicircle so students can clearly see you & feel connected to the rest of the group. Or, use benches, hay bales, or even a well-maintained lawn area.
- Giving directions before passing out materials and making expectations clear will help students to understand what they are supposed to do (idea: use whiteboard and draw pictures).
- Have a Job Board: 3-4 jobs for students to rotate between. Break down the steps for the garden job and have students identify necessary tools before going to the toolshed.
- Signal when it's time to clean up: Put tools back, pick up trash.
- After gardening, review what was accomplished, how things went logistically, and what tied-in to past lessons. Linking garden activities to classroom learning reinforces the importance of taking garden time seriously.
- Kids mirror us. If you calm and quiet yourself, they will follow. If you enter with energy, you might have to grab their attention more often.
- Create Inefficiency--it's not the most efficient to have kids fill up 1 gallon pots with compost and walk far to dump it. BUT, it will allow more kids to do a task when a wheelbarrow allows 2- 3 kids to participate.
- Have the sample of the lesson to show them what they are going to end up with. Students need something to visualize, but we're not expecting them to create an identical example.
- If the first child provides the right answer to a question, ask others so you get multiple answers. This allows students to feel like their answer is important too. Or, ask students to whisper their answers to the person next to them before asking the class for a response.
- Routinely do short bouts of work as a class, such as 5 to 10 minutes of weeding, mulching, planting, irrigation, or planting seeds to germinate each time you are in the garden
- Allow groups to take ownership by adopting a tree, bed, plant, etc.

### Backpocket Garden Activities

Even without a set lesson, you can provide engaging education experiences for students. Here are some ideas that we use regularly:

<p><b>Earth Art:</b> Gather objects from the garden to make a mosaic/picture. Use sticks as a frame.</p> <p><b>Nature Bracelets:</b> make bracelets from colored painter's tape turned sticky-side out--students add flowers, leaves, etc.</p> <p><b>Dig for Worms:</b> Add to compost pile or</p>	<p><b>Herb Bouquets:</b> mint, rosemary, basil, etc. wrapped in twine or recycled rubber bands.</p> <p><b>Garden Yoga:</b> Imitative poses: pretend to be a tree (tree pose), seed (child's pose), frog (squat pose).</p> <p><b>Lizard Lounges &amp; Fairy/Gnome Homes:</b> Use organic objects from the garden, or upcycled materials ie: rocks, wine bottle</p>
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<p>garden beds.</p> <p><b>Mini Scavenger Hunt:</b> Find colors, shapes, textures, opposites, etc.</p> <p><b>Pine Cone Bird Feeders:</b> Gather pine cones. Use sunflower seed butter (b/c nut allergies), bird seed and utensils for smearing the butter into all the crevices.</p> <p><b>Herbs:</b> Smell, taste, touch!</p>	<p>corks, sticks, etc.</p> <p><b>Rainbow Chips:</b> Find something in nature that matches your rainbow paint chip, using paint swatches from Home Depot or Lowes.</p> <p><b>Weed:</b> After weeding, have students examine the plants they have collected. Sort the weeds by type, color, or size. Which weeds are the most common?</p>
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### Participation Structures

- One of the most effective means of equalizing participation and engagement across a diverse group is to provide a structure for response when you pose a question to your group. Every activity starts and ends with students in a circle, talking about something. You can make this discussion richer and more engaging by adding any of the following participation structures to it.
  - **Think-Pair-Share:** Explain that you are going to pose a question. Their job is to think about the answer, silently, and give a thumbs-up when they have thought of something; then, tell them to turn to a person sitting near them to talk about their reflections. Once they've discussed their answers, ask each pair to share their thoughts with the room (ask for the answers the pair had in common or answers they heard from their partners to encourage active listening). Side Note: For introverted students, this gives them the time to process their thoughts and ensures they have the experience of expressing their thoughts out loud. Often, once they've had a run-through with another student, they're much more likely to want to share with the whole class.
  - **Toe-to-Toe:** Have Scouts stand up. Explain to Scouts that you'll call out 2 body parts, like "toe-to-toe!" and their job will be to find someone silently and stand toe-to-toe with them. Once everyone is silently paired up (if there's an odd number, you can play, too), pose a question for the pairs to discuss. After a minute, call out a new set of body parts, such as "pinky-to-pinky," "elbow-to-elbow" or "knee-to-knee." Their job is to find a new partner, connect silently, and then together with their new partner answer a new question posed by you.
  - **Hop and Find:** Ask everyone to start hopping on one foot. Now their job is to hop around and find someone else also hopping on that same foot. If almost everyone has a partner, but you have two people left hopping on different feet, tell them they can be partners. Once they've found a partner, have them do

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something fun to connect, like give a high-five, or have a thumb war. Then ask a question and have them share answers with their partners.

- **In-Out Circle:** Have Scouts stand up in a circle. Ask every other Scout going around the circle to take a step into the circle and then make a half-turn clockwise, so that they are now facing the person who used to be standing to their right. Now they have a partner (if you have an odd number of Scouts, you can play, too). Have them do something fun to connect, like give a high-five or have a thumb war. Then ask a question and have them share answers with their partners. Next, tell the outside circle to move one person to the right, so each Scout has a new partner. Ask a new question for them to share, or ask them to share what they just learned about the first question from their last partner.
- **Pass the Ball:** Gather all your Scouts in one circle. Hold a ball and explain that this is the “talking ball.” Ask a question and ask anyone who wants to answer to raise a hand. Toss the ball to someone with their hand up. They can answer while they have the ball and then toss it to anyone else who has their hand raised. Once everyone who wants to answer has had a chance, they can toss the ball back to you and you can pose a new question.

### **Cooperative Learning**

1. Dividing students into small groups can bring a welcomed sense of structure to outdoor learning activities.
  - a. Before, teach them listening to one another and sharing responsibilities
    - i. How this works: Teachers provide students with clear directions for a structured activity, and then provide support for the groups as they work together.
2. Divide the class into groups for garden classroom work.
3. Set up multiple independent stations that students can explore in groups.
  - a. completing a garden scavenger hunt, measuring and recording the growth of sunflowers they planted last week, and collecting seeds from dried flower heads

### **Getting The Group's Attention**

- Address the class when everyone is quiet
- Do NOT phrase things with “don’t”. Refer to Garden Agreements
  - EX: don’t tap your pencil. Instead, EX: Do be good listeners
- Piggyback on teachers way of getting attention
- Have a loud sound and a quiet sound based on lesson
  - Loud: bird call, howl like coyotes, rooster call, crow call
  - Quiet: chime, rain stick, coyote hand sign
- Use call-and response sayings to get your class's attention:

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GEM	Students
Ready set	You bet!
Hocus Pocus	Everybody Focus!
Holy Moly	Guacamole!
Macaroni and Cheese	Everybody Freeze!
1,2,3 eyes on me	1,2,3 eyes on you
Ready to Rock	Ready to Roll
All set	You bet!
Hands on Top	That means stop
Freeze!	Alaska
Yo yo yo	¿Que paso?

### Discipline and Conflict Resolution

- Do NOT handle problems publicly
  - This risks embarrassing the student
    - This can make her retaliate and then deal with a power struggle
- Positive Discipline
  - Encourage students to be their best selves
    - Notice what students are doing well and compliment them
    - Pointing out students who are behaving appropriately can also help show other students a model of expected behavior.
    - Think of garden jobs that will bring out the best in particular students or groups
    - Ask questions (e.g. “Why do you think you got pulled out of the circle?”)
    - If a student gets sent out of the group, have an adult follow up with a discussion with the student
    - Provide positive rewards for good behavior. Rewards do not have to be tangible; praise and special privileges (ex: Reward with more responsibility) can be positive rewards.
    - Avoid using garden jobs as negative punishments, e.g. don’t use weeding as a form of punishment as it can develop negative associations for the student with gardens in general.

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The above strategies are a proactive approach to preventing conflict and allowing students to show up as their best selves. However, when conflict does arise, you can use these questions to find a resolution. These questions are most appropriate for older students (3rd grade and up).

### **Questions: to help those affected**

1. What did you think when you realized what had happened?
2. What impact has the incident had on you and others?
3. What has been the hardest thing for you?
4. What do you think needs to happen to make things right?

### **Questions: to respond to the challenging behavior**

1. What happened?
2. What were you thinking/feeling all the time?
3. What have you thought about since?
4. Who has been affected by what you have done?
5. In what way have they been affected?
6. What do you think you need to do to make things right?

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