

Photo Fun

Overview: Sneak a little learning into your garden time by engaging kids in photography in the garden. As young gardeners search for photo-ready subjects, they are practicing observation skills and learning how to document their findings – two tools they can use for any science exploration.

Materials:

Cameras (any kind)
Garden journals and pencils

Approximate Time to Complete: 1+ hours

Location: Outdoor

Ages: K-12th

Season: Any season

Instructions:

1. Set aside time to visit the garden with a camera, journal and pencil. (If you do not have a garden, any natural area will do.) Provide a gentle reminder to your gardeners that as they are exploring and finding the perfect shots, they want to be careful where they step so they do not disturb their photo subjects or cause harm to nearby plants.
2. If you want to encourage unstructured discovery time, just turn your youth gardeners loose and ask them to search for photo subjects they find interesting. Suggest they take a few notes after each photo that describes what they saw and why they decided they wanted to document it, as well as where the shot was taken.
3. If you would like to guide your gardeners' learning, here are a few ideas to bring their photos into focus:

Hold a photographic scavenger hunt. Ask kids to take photos of specific things, such as,
Find materials representing every color of the rainbow.
Find 5 types of flying insects.
Look for wacky-shaped fruits or vegetables in the garden.
Document different leaf shapes.

You can also suggest a reverse scavenger hunt where your kids take photos of subjects around a central theme of their own choosing. Then they share their photos with you or their friends to see if you can figure out what they all have in common.



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Make a Garden ABC book. Motivate young children to learn the alphabet by working together to identify and photograph plants and other objects whose names start with a different letter of the alphabet. Older youth gardeners could make a Garden ABC book to give as a gift to younger siblings or friends.

Document the seasons. Identify a couple of plants or specific landscape shots and have the youth capture photos during spring, summer, fall and winter. They can take notes about the weather when each shot was taken, the time of day, and other details. At the end of the year they can compare photos and discuss or write about the changes they saw over the course of the seasons.

Watch fruit form. Have children select a few flowers to photograph in the garden, and then have them revisit the flowers daily to see how they change. Consider marking the blooms with gently placed ribbons or garden tape around their stems so they can easily identify them. Hopefully the blooms will get pollinated (and even better if they can capture the pollinator's visit) and then your young gardeners can watch as the flower slowly transforms into the fruit with seeds. Vegetable garden plants are an obvious choice for this activity, especially for younger children.

Create a photo field guide. Have children take shots of some of their favorite plants and conduct a little research to create a field guide for the garden. Field guides are publications designed to help people identify living things outdoors. Each plant could have one photograph, or you could suggest they also take shots of specific parts like leaves and flowers to help with identification. Written descriptions, such as "has tiny hairs on stems" can further distinguish among plants. Have them invite their friends and family for a garden visit and challenge them to use their guide to identify what is in your garden.

Capture life cycle changes. The garden is a very dynamic space and offers lots of examples of how living things change over time. You can document a seed sprouting and growing, observe the process of decomposition (e.g., by taking shots every few days of a squash left outdoors in the heat), or search for a milkweed plant to try to capture the stages of development of a monarch butterfly.

Create a garden scrapbook. Use the photos to create a visual memory of the garden season. If a whole scrapbook seems daunting, have youth make a collage of photos for display.

Create photo note cards. Children can use glue sticks or photo tape to attach images to heavy paper or card stock and use the cards for thank you notes and special occasions. Or they can wrap batches in homemade paper or tissue paper, tie them with ribbons, and give the sets as a gifts.

4. Regardless of what type of activity you do, make sure to follow up by giving your young photographers time to share their work. You could do this by creating a space in your home or classroom for the photos to be on display, host an informal or formal art show for friends and family, or perhaps even enter their photos in a photo contest.

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