

Kindness in the Garden

Overview: Gardening programs offer many opportunities for youth to practice showing kindness to each other, to their community, and to our planet. Use this lesson to inspire your students to brainstorm and complete one or more acts of kindness through your garden.

Grade Level/Range: All ages

Objective: Students will use the garden as a tool for expressing kindness and compassion.

Time: Will vary depending on selected act of kindness

Materials: Will vary depending on selected act of kindness



Background Information

Youth garden programs offer many opportunities for gardeners to show kindness, compassion, and empathy. The harvest of the garden can be shared, the beauty of a garden space can offer peace, and the skills learned through gardening can be used to help others. Drawing from the concept of *pay it forward*, by which a person who has received a gift repays it by giving a gift to another instead of the original donor, use this lesson to inspire your young gardeners this year to *plant it forward*.

Laying the Groundwork

There are a number of garden-related books available to help youth explore the idea of showing kindness through gardening. Here are a few suggestions along with possible discussion questions:

If You Plant a Seed by Kadir Nelson (Prek – Early Elementary)

A Place to Grow by Stephanie Bloom (Elementary)

Wanda’s Roses by Pat Brisson (Elementary)

The Shadow Garden by Cherie Foster Colburn (Elementary)

Seedfolks by Paul Fleischman (Middle – High School)

Read and discuss *If You Plant a Seed* by Kadir Nelson. Ask the following questions:

What do you get when you plant tomato, carrot, and cabbage seeds? *Tomato, carrot, and cabbage plants.*

What happened when the rabbit and the mouse refused to share their harvest with the birds? *They ended up fighting and ruining all the fruits and vegetables.*

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What happened when the rabbit and mouse shared their harvest with the birds? *The birds were grateful and they helped sow additional plants for an even bigger harvest for everyone.*

What does the author say is the sweetest fruit? *The fruit of kindness.*

Did the rabbit and mouse receive benefits from being kind? *Yes.*

Read and discuss the book *A Place to Grow* by Stephanie Bloom. You can use the following questions to guide your conversation:

In the book, the Tiny Seed is on a journey looking for a place to grow. How is Tiny Seed feeling on his journey? *Scared, worried, anxious, frustrated.*

Does anyone try to comfort him along the way? *The Big Tree, The Wind.*

How do they try to help? *The Big Tree assures him he will find a place to grow and to enjoy his journey. The Wind carries him away from the places where he does not belong and also provides words of encouragement to him.*

Does anyone treat him poorly along his journey?

The ant thinks he is a pebble, the cow tries to eat him, the vegetables are mean because he is not exactly like them.

How did the seed feel when the vegetables were mean to him? *He was very sad and beginning to lose hope that he would find his place.*

What kind of things did the meadow provide for the Tiny Seed? *Sunlight, water, moist soil.*

Explain to your students that compassion is wanting to help when someone needs it. Which of the characters in this story were compassionate? *The Big Tree and The Wind.*

How did they show their compassion? *Through their words and actions.*

Read and discuss *Wanda's Roses* by Pat Brisson. Answer the following questions:

Why did Wanda begin cleaning up an empty lot in her neighborhood? *She wanted to make room for a "rosebush."*

How did all of the neighbors react to her cleaning the lot? *They all pitched in and helped even though they did not think her plant was actually a rosebush.*

What did Wanda do when her bush did not bloom? *She made flowers from paper and invited the neighbors who had helped her to a tea to celebrate.*

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What happened at the tea party? *Everyone brought rose bushes because they wanted to help and soon the lot was a beautiful rose garden.*

In this book, the neighbors worked together to make a beautiful space. Ask students to share examples from their own lives where they have worked with others to get big projects done.

Read and discuss *The Shadow Garden* by Cherie Foster Colburn.

In *The Shadow Garden*, the main character's grandmother is not feeling well and cannot go out into her garden because being in the sun made her feel sick. What did he and his grandfather try to do first to make her feel better? *They gave her cards and letters, read books to her, and made her tea.*

What did they decide to try next? *They decided she missed her garden and so they planted a garden that she could enjoy at night.*

What kind of things did they include in the garden? *Plants that bloom at night. Lights on the trees.*

In addition to plants, what also lived in the shadow garden? *Birds, crickets, moths, a raccoon.*

How did his grandmother feel about her garden? *It made her very happy.*

Ask your students, Did the young child and his/her grandfather know how to help his grandmother at first? *No, they tried many things.*

How do you think they came up with the idea of a shadow garden? *Perhaps they tried to think about her favorite things before she got sick and then came up with an idea on how to adapt it considering her new limitations.*

Read and discuss *Seedfolks* by Paul Fleischman.

Check out our [lesson plan on Seedfolks](#) for a full list of discussion questions.

Exploration

1. Ask your youth gardeners to brainstorm ways they may be able to use their garden to show kindness to others in your community. Here are a few ideas to consider:

- Collect and save seeds from your garden to donate to other youth or community garden programs or home gardeners. Learn more about [harvesting and preserving seeds](#).
- Donate a portion of your harvest to a local food bank or shelter. Read about an awesome, inspirational program called Katie's Krops: <http://www.katieskrops.com/>
- Host a garden party and invite school neighbors to enjoy your garden space with you.
- Make bookmarks from [pressed flowers](#) and donate them to your school or local library.

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- [Start a community garden on your school grounds](#). Offering neighbors space to garden can provide benefits for everyone involved.
- Use your garden to enhance the local environment in your community. Build a [rain garden](#) and decrease pollution from storm water runoff, plant trees and improve air quality, or install native plants to provide habitats for wildlife.
- Host a clean-up day in your neighborhood. Have your young gardeners use their new gardening skills to help weed and prune in your neighborhood.

2. After initial brainstorming, create a chart of your favorite ideas and estimate the cost and time associated with each. Which of your ideas do you have the resources to accomplish?

3. Plan and carry out your act of kindness.

4. Repeat as often as possible.

Making Connections

Ask students to consider if they also receive benefits when they are kind. Share an example of when you were kind and received a benefit and then let them share examples if they want. Make sure to explain that the benefits do not need to be “things,” and that the best reward is feeling good because you were able to help.

Ask students to write about the act of kindness they performed to document and analyze the experience. Answer the questions: What did you do? How did you make a difference? How did it make you feel?

Branching Out

Using the books listed the Laying the Groundwork as inspiration, ask students to write their own book about kindness using the garden or nature as the setting. Host a book reading to share with family and friends.

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