

A Year in the Garden

Overview: Documenting life in your garden or a nearby greenspace each month for a year is a fun way to explore seasonal changes while also connecting young gardeners to their local ecosystem.

Materials:

- Garden journal (can be sheets of lined paper) and pencil
- Drawing paper and colored pencils, markers, and/or crayons (optional)
- Digital camera (optional)



Approximate Time to Complete: 15 to 30 minutes each month for a year

Location: Outdoor

Ages: All ages

Season: All seasons

Instructions

From an early age we learn the basic characteristics of each season, but depending on where we live what we actually see unfolding may not always fit the generic descriptions we learn at school. By encouraging kids to pick one spot in their garden or a nearby greenspace to visit each month, they can better explore what the annual cycle of seasons looks like in their ecosystem. Not only is this a great lesson about changes in the natural world, it also allows kids to develop more personal connections to the environment they live in.

1. **Choose dates.** Begin by selecting one day each month for making observations. Although it doesn't need to be the same day each month, try to schedule observation dates about 30 days apart.
2. **Select your location.** Pick a garden or greenspace that is easily accessible and allows kids to observe plant life, and possibly animal life too. If greenspace is limited, you can do a more focused observation — for example, by choosing one specific street tree to follow for the year.
3. **Gather your observation supplies.** At minimum, each child should have a garden journal (which can simply be a 12+ sheets of lined paper stapled together) and a pencil. Consider adding sheets of plain (unlined) paper



These raised beds and containers planted with annual flowers changed dramatically in just a few months.

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for sketching, as well as colored pencils, markers, or crayons for drawing and, if available, a digital camera for a few select photos.

- 4. Visit the space at least once per month.** Try to find a time where the weather is pleasant enough for kids to spend at 15 to 30 minutes (or longer) making observations in a combination of writing and drawing, depending on their age and interest. Some kids need very little prompting for this exploration. If some children need more guidance, provide more structure with specific directions, such as:

- Write down the date.
- What is the temperature? What does it feel like outside?
- What do the plants look like? Are there leaves on the trees and shrubs? Do you see any flowers?
- What kind animals do you see? Insects? Birds? Mammals? Other?
- How does it make you feel to be outside right now?

End each observation session by having kids draw a picture of what they see right now and/or take a digital photo to capture their observations.



- 5. Place observations in a secure location so they'll be easy to find each month.** At the end of the year, have kids display their observations and take time to compare and discuss. Prompt them with questions, such as, What kind of changes did you see? What do seasons look like in our area? Which months do you think represent winter, spring, summer, and fall? Did you have a favorite month? A least favorite?

You can take learning to the next level by digging into why the seasons exist (the position of the Earth in relationship to the sun) and how plants and animals are adapted to survive in the different seasons.

You can also extend learning by having kids use their artwork or photos to create a wall calendar for the next year. It can serve as a reminder to continue making observations, and it's a great way to track changes in your garden and or local greenspace.

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