

Friendship Fort

Overview: Having a special place to hang out with friends is a great addition to a garden or green space.

Materials:

- Pole bean seeds
- Six to eight 8' lengths of bamboo (or substitute stakes)

Approximate Time to Complete: 30 minutes to 1 hour to plant

Location: Outdoor

Ages: 2-12

Season: Spring through fall

Instructions

1. Select a location in full sun with moist, well-drained soil.
2. Choose a "pole bean" variety; these are vigorous growers that will twine their vines around a support. Avoid "bush bean" varieties because they remain short and shrubby.
3. Lash together the ends of six to eight 8' lengths of bamboo. If you do not have bamboo available, you could use fallen limbs or any other type of long stake. Stand them upright, spreading the ends of the bamboo pieces to create a cone-shaped fort that's about 5' in diameter at the base. Push the bamboo pieces into the ground for stability.
4. Clear the weeds, grass, and rocks from the soil in a 12" wide path around the bamboo pieces to create the planting area. Loosen the soil to a depth of at least 8", and add some compost or slow-release fertilizer.
5. Plant 2–3 pole bean seeds at the base of each piece of bamboo, leaving a section unplanted as a door.
6. Gently water the seeds at planting time. Have kids check the soil moisture every day, and water as needed to keep



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the soil moist, especially while the plants are young. (Once the plants are older, they will grow deep roots and be able to handle drier conditions.)

Kids can begin enjoying their new bean fort immediately after construction, just explain that they need to watch out for their baby plants as they begin emerging from the soil.

7. Once the plants have a few sets of leaves, gently place mulch around them to help keep the weeds and grass from growing back. You may also need to cut the grass or pull weeds from inside the fort, at least until the bean plants grow tall enough to shade it.

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