

Mindfulness in the Garden

Overview: While simply being in the garden can nourish the mind, body, and soul, these three no-supplies-needed activities can help kids feel grounded while connecting to nature and themselves.

Materials: None

Approximate Time to Complete: 15 minutes

Location: INDOOR, OUTDOOR

Ages: K-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12

Season: SUMMER, SPRING, WINTER, FALL

Instructions:

Keen Observation

This practice sets time for kids to slow down, take in their surroundings, and observe changes in the garden. It can be done as a one-time activity, but it is most effective when it is conducted as a regular opening practice whenever kids arrive at the garden.

1. Circle up and explain that everyone will be doing an observation activity. Let them know they will silently observe the surrounding environment for a designated time. This time will depend on what is appropriate for your group of students; 1-3 minutes is usually a good starting place. Tell kids that while you, as the activity leader, will be speaking, and they, as the keen observers, should remain silent during this activity. However, they will have an opportunity to share afterward.
2. Allow kids to choose an area in their garden as their “observation station.” If you plan on integrating this activity into your welcome routine, tell kids that they will be returning to this spot over the next semester, season, or year. Be sure to designate the parameters of the area they will be observing so that they stay in your line of sight, are close enough to hear you, and don’t wander off.
3. Once kids are settled in, begin guiding them through their keen observation. Ask questions that are relevant to your environment, such as:
 - a. What do you feel on your skin?
 - b. What sounds do you hear?
 - c. What do you smell?
 - d. What is the closest thing you can see?
 - e. Look as far as the eye can see – what is there?
 - f. What colors stand out to you?



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4. You can also give prompts such as:
 - a. Observe your favorite plant. Zoom in and look as closely as you can.
 - b. Observe a plant or creature that you aren't familiar with. Observe its shapes, colors, and how it grows or moves.
 - c. Observe the conditions in the sky. Look at the shape of the clouds, where the sun is in the sky, and what the weather looks like in the distance.

Note: You can switch some of these questions or prompts up each time, but it is good to ask at least a few of the same ones so that kids can notice changes over time.

5. Give students some time to silently observe on their own and let them know how much time is left.
6. After the time is up, call them back and circle up. Give kids an opportunity to share what they have observed, first with a partner and then together as a group. Prompt them to think about the following:
 - a. What stood out from their observation practice?
 - b. How did they feel before, during, and/or after?
 - c. What changes in the garden did they notice compared to the previous observation?

This activity was inspired by and adapted from the [‘E kilo ‘oe activity](#) from [Māla‘ai: The Culinary Garden of Waimea Middle School](#).

Mindful Movement

Get kids moving their bodies in a playful way that allows them to channel the energy of the garden.

1. Instruct your youth group to form a circle (rather than a traditional formation with students facing the teacher at the front).
2. Start by having students sit down. Guide kids to silently think about how they feel in their bodies today. Let them know that any feeling is okay to feel. Set the tone by telling them they are going to have fun moving their bodies while embodying different aspects of the garden and things that live there.
3. Before you move, help bring kids into the present moment by taking a few breaths together. Guide youth to close their eyes and take a slow, deep inhale and exhale. Repeat three times. Play with instructing kids to take a "lion's breath" on the exhales, where they stick their tongue out while making their exhales audible. After beginning with breath, you can guide your group through any of the following mindful movement activities:
4. **Free movement.** Begin mindful movement practice by giving kids 1 minute to move their bodies however they want! Whether it be a dance, stretch, or kung-fu move, they can use this opportunity to get any extra energy out. Remind them that they should try to move by themselves and avoid physical contact with each other.
5. **Journey of a plant flow.** In this movement practice, kids will act out the life cycle of the plant.

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- a. Seed: Curl up in a small ball and use your hands to “bury” yourself deep into the ground. Close your eyes and wait for rain to feed you. Take a few breaths. The rain comes and you slowly begin to grow in size.
- b. Seedling: Your hands become the first leaves of the plant as it pops out from under the ground. You’re still close to the ground, not fully grown yet. You inhale as you take in the air and nourishment from the sun. You exhale and release oxygen for all the people in the garden to breathe.
- c. Plant: You begin to grow upwards, and you extend your legs and arms fully to reach up to the sky. With your hands pointing up to capture the sun, you sway side to side in the wind.
- d. Flower: Finally, you are ready to become a flower. Your arms and legs spread wide, and you have a huge smile, just like a flower opens up itself to the world. Everyone smiles at you in return, admiring your beauty. The flowers and bees can’t help themselves, and all come to visit you.
- e. Seed: You’ve come full cycle. You were a seed that grew into a seedling, then a mature plant, and finally made flowers that have now transformed into seeds again. You are now on the ground. Slowly start to shrink back into the seed ball and tuck yourself back into the ground.
- f. Repeat the cycle if you wish.

6. Garden shape-shifting. Allow students to take turns leading the group. One at a time, they will demonstrate to the group their pose of choice. Encourage them to get creative! They can invent and name their own poses or think of garden-related things to mimic with their bodies, such as:

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| a. The sun | e. Rain |
| b. The wind | f. Trees |
| c. Birds | g. Rocks |
| d. Bees | |

7. Become a bug. Explore different body shapes by prompting kids to take on the form of and move like any of the following creatures:

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| a. Butterfly | e. Grub worm |
| b. Beetle | f. Caterpillar |
| c. Earthworm | |
| d. Centipede | |

8. Closing. End your mindful movement practice with a big group inhalation and exhalation before moving on to other activities.

Aromatherapy Exploration

Kids will become mindful of their breath while connecting to the scent of various garden plants and how their aromas make them feel.

Choose any aromatic plants you may have in your garden, such as:

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| • Lavender | • Thyme |
| • Rosemary | • Sage |
| • Mint | • Basil |
| • Peppermint | |

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- Citrus leaves
- Rose flowers

As an opener, ask students what their favorite smell is and how it makes them feel.

1. Explain to your youth group that they will be exploring different plant smells and how their bodies respond to them.
2. Work with kids to harvest the fragrant parts from the plants or have them ready to go. Alternatively, if your garden space allows for it, you can take a “scent exploration tour” and move with your kid group from plant to plant.
3. If kids are harvesting from the plant, give them a quick demonstration on how to harvest leaves or flowers without damaging the plant – they’ll only need a few.
4. When each kid has a sample of the aromatic plants in hand, instruct them to close their eyes, take a deep inhale, and exhale.
5. Tell the kids to massage the leaves in their hand to release the aromatic oils, and then bring the plant close to their nose, and do a deep inhalation. Repeat the deep inhales and exhales at least 3 times with their eyes closed.
6. Let kids have a few moments in silence before prompting them to open their eyes.
7. As a group, offer each kid an opportunity to share how they are feeling. You can have them share out loud to the group, or, alternatively, have them write down how they are feeling so that they are encouraged to tune into their own bodies and are not influenced by what their peers may have felt.

Aromatic plants, especially their essential oils, are often associated with the following feelings:

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| a. Lavender – relaxing; calming | e. Sage – well-being; soothing |
| b. Rosemary – attentive; energetic | f. Basil – stimulating; energizing |
| c. Peppermint – soothing; alert | g. Citrus leaves – cheerful; positive |
| d. Thyme – uplifting; energizing | h. Rose – calming; balancing |
8. Although simply taking time to just breathe can help anyone feel calm and relaxed, inhaling fragrances can enhance and even alter their feelings. Have kids experiment with the aromatic effects of a few different plants and see if your youth group can discern any variance in how they feel after smelling them.

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