

Frozen Treasures

Stir up some garden fun with a wintertime treasure hunt. Hide simple ice cube gems to encourage young gardeners to explore the garden during winter months.

Materials:

- Ice cube trays or silicone molds
- Water
- Natural or artificial food-safe dye or assorted natural items such as dried flowers, berries or bird seed

Approximate Time to Complete: 3 to 6 hours preparation, exploration unlimited

Location: Indoor and Outdoor

Ages: Pre-K, K-2

Season: Winter



Instructions

The first step is to make your gems. Use ice cube trays or silicone molds to create gems of different sizes and shapes. You could also use cupcake pans or repurposed food storage containers if you don't have either of those on hand. You can make the gems yourself or let kids help you create them. For quick preparation, you can add food dye to water to create desired colors and then pour into the trays. If you would like to inspire a little bit more indoor experimenting, try making your color water using natural dyes. Here are a few ideas:

- Red- beet juice
- Orange – paprika or carrot powder mixed into water
- Blue – butterfly pea powder or blue spirulina powder mixed with water
- Purple – butterfly pea tea with lemon juice (the acidity in the lemon juice causes the color to change from blue to purple and is an opportunity to introduce the concept of pH)
- Pink – dried hibiscus flowers

If you are concerned that food dye may stain clothing, you can also create your gems by freezing colorful natural items in your ice cubes such as dried flowers, berries, small pinecones or bird seed. Since gems will eventually melt, choose items you feel are safe for your gardeners to handle.

Pour the liquid into the trays or molds and place them in the freezer. If you are using small natural items, place items in trays first and then cover with water. Depending on the size of the trays and the additives, it will take 3 to 6 hours for the water to freeze (or longer for larger containers).

Hide your gems in the garden. Tuck them into places with seasonal interest for kids to notice, such as near early spring bulb foliage popping up or on shrubs holding on to berries for the birds. If your soil is not frozen, you can even bury a few in a designated dig bed to provide opportunities for shoveling fun. Help kids gear up for the weather then let them loose in the garden. Ask them to announce when they've found a gem so you can discuss what they see nearby (such as bulb foliage, berries, or other winter wonders).

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You can keep them exploring by letting them help hide the gems for a second round.

Related Resources:

Art in the Winter Garden: <https://kidsgardening.org/resources/garden-activities-art-in-the-winter-garden/>

Wild Bird Holiday Decorations: <https://kidsgardening.org/resources/garden-activities-wild-bird-holiday-decorations/>

Exploring Plant Dyes: <https://kidsgardening.org/resources/lesson-plans-exploring-plant-dyes/>