

Pet Garden

Overview: Gardens provide a habitat for a diversity of wild animals in our ecosystem, but they can also offer fresh fruits and vegetables for our favorite companion animals too. Designing and growing a garden to supply food for home and classroom pets provides the opportunity to better understand their needs, foster a sense of responsibility, and show love for these special friends.

Grade Level/Range: K- 5th Grade

Objective(s):

Students will:

- Research the dietary needs of home and classroom pets.
- Identify plants that can be grown in the garden for domesticated animals and learn about important gardening techniques they must adopt for a safe harvest.
- Plan and design a garden space for growing food for pets.

Time: 1 hour

Materials:

- Index Cards
- Pens or pencils
- Clipboard
- String
- Pet Garden Worksheet (page 4 of this download)
- Internet access or resource books
- Posters
- Markers, crayons or paint
- Blank drawing paper or graph paper
- Colored pencils

Background Information

Fruits and vegetables are an important part of many domesticated animals' diet. Animals can be grouped into three kinds of eaters: herbivores, carnivores, and omnivores. An herbivore eats mostly plants, a carnivore mostly meat, and an omnivore consumes a diet including both.

Your garden provides excellent opportunities to study food webs of both wild and domesticated animals. Plants are *producers* that make their own food by transforming the energy of sunlight into carbohydrates through the process of photosynthesis. Garden plants create the base of many different food webs as they directly provide food for a diversity of herbivore and omnivore *consumers* and a habitat for carnivores.

The animals who live in the garden may be the first to come to mind when creating a garden food web; however, just like us, many domesticated animals can also enjoy the bounty of garden harvest. Dogs, cats, rabbits,



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guinea pigs, and reptiles are just a few examples of beloved pets that can enjoy treats from the garden. Learn more in [Plants for Pet Friends](#).

When planting a garden for pets, it is important to carefully research the plants that are safe for them to consume and to also keep a list of plants that are toxic to them. Because animals are smaller than us, they are also more likely to have negative reactions to pesticides, so gardening organically is of critical importance when you are growing plants specifically for companion animals. (Note that some organic pesticides can be toxic if used improperly.)

Laying the Groundwork

Introduce students to the ideas of producers and consumers and show them examples of food webs. Explain that you are going to make a food web for your garden.

Visit your garden or a local greenspace and create an inventory of all the plants and animals you see by writing the name of each on separate index cards (list one organism on each card). If you are growing a vegetable garden, make sure to include people as one of the organisms.

Return to the classroom and sort your cards into two stacks: one for producers and one for consumers.

Next, talk about the different types of consumers and how they are divided into the categories of herbivores, carnivores, and omnivores. Define each category. Further divide your consumer stack of cards into each of these categories.

Once you have them sorted, give each student a card and weave a classroom food web by giving the end of a ball of string to a producer and then pass the ball as you connect to organisms who eat that producer and then the following consumers. You can either try to connect all the students together in one web or make multiple, and potentially overlapping food webs.

Exploration

Ask students, are there any animals that we did not see in our garden that you think might also consume food from the garden? Did you know many of our favorite pets also enjoy fruits and vegetables?

Divide students into small groups and have them research the dietary needs of different companion animals that are commonly found in homes and maybe even school classrooms. Are they herbivores, omnivores, or carnivores? Also ask them to research and create a list of foods that can be grown in the garden that their companion animal might enjoy. The article [Plants for Pet Friends](#) can serve as a resource. They can use the Pet Garden Worksheet to help guide their research.

Ask each group to create a poster or slide that includes the information they discovered. Display their posters or share the presentation with friends and family.

Making Connections

Dive deeper by asking students to use the plant lists created in the Exploration to design their own pet gardens. They can either design it for a pet at home, a classroom pet, or a dream pet they would like to have one day.

The depth of the garden design can vary to fit the skill level of your students. A simple plan can be done on a piece of blank paper without

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thinking about spacing or planting seasons. More advanced students can be tasked with researching plant spacing and growing conditions and then creating garden design plan to scale using graph paper.

Branching Out

In addition to learning about what plants your pets like to eat, it is also important for students to understand that some plants are toxic for pets and should be avoided. Asks students to continue their research by creating a list of plants that should be avoided. Two resources they could use include:

[Common Poisonous Plants and Plant Parts](#) (Texas A & M)

[Poisonous Plants: Toxic and Non-Toxic Plants List](#) (ASPCA)

Animal Poison Control Center Phone Number: (888) 426-4435)

Connection to Standards

This lesson can be used to teach the following Next Generation Science Standards:

K-LS1-1. Use observations to describe patterns of what plants and animals (including humans) need to survive.

5-PS3-1. Use models to describe that energy in animals' food (used for body repair, growth, motion, and to maintain body warmth) was once energy from the sun.

5-LS2-1. Develop a model to describe the movement of matter among plants, animals, decomposers, and the environment.

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Pet Garden Worksheet



Student Names: _____

Type of Animal: _____

This animal is a(n):

Herbivore

Carnivore

Omnivore

This animal's favorite foods (circle any fruits and vegetables that could be grown in the garden):

Research plant ideas for your pet garden:

Plant Name	Planting Season (spring, summer, fall, or winter)	How much space does this plant need?