
Planting a Native Garden

Activity Overview

Students learn how to plant while planting transplants in their school's native garden.

Objectives

Students will:

- Learn how to properly plant transplants in their native garden
- Understand that plants need space, soil, water, and sunlight to grow
- Participate in a project to improve the environment

Subjects Covered

Science

Grades

K through 12

Activity Time

1 hour

Season

Spring, summer, fall

Materials

Plants, trowels, source for water, watering containers, mulch (if desired)

Modified from Earth Partnership for Schools K-12 Curriculum Guide, University of Wisconsin Board of Regents.

Background

Planting a native garden is a very special event in a school year and an important contribution to the environment. Therefore, consider including the entire school community by integrating some form of a ceremony or dedication into the planting project. Because of curriculum requirements, this may be the only opportunity some students will have with the planning and implementation of a native garden.

Whether you are planting shrubs, trees, or herbaceous plants, there are a few tips for successful planting. First, dig a hole that is considerably wider and as deep as, or just slightly deeper, than the container or root system of the plant. It is not necessary to modify the soil, so use the soil you dig out to fill the hole back in once you have placed the plant. If you modify the soil within the hole too much you might discourage the plant from extending its roots away from the hole.

If you purchase plants in pots, it is possible that the plants have not been growing in the pots for very long; therefore, much of the soil will fall off when you remove the plant from the pot. That is OK. The pots are a way for the plant to be held until you get it into the ground. On the other hand, if the plants have been in the pot for too long, the roots can coil around the pot, becoming "pot bound." If that happens, and you do not loosen and straighten the roots when you remove them from the pot, the roots will continue to grow in this pot form and eventually strangle the plant. In either case, when placing the plant in the hole, straighten the roots out. Do not coil the roots to fit them into too small a hole because they will continue growing in the direction you place them and could once again strangle the plant. If you cannot dig a large enough hole it is better to cut the root than to coil it.

A common error when planting woody plants is to plant them too deep. Woody plants have a root collar that should be level with or slightly above the grade of the soil when you are finished filling in the hole. The same is true when you are planting "plugs" or other herbaceous plants. Try to place them at the same soil height as they were originally growing. This might take some close inspection but is usually obvious. Plugs can seem root bound, but if the roots are not coiled you can just spread them out.

Generally, plants are spaced about one foot apart when planted in the ground. After planting, water the soil well and make provisions for continued watering the first summer. After a planting, new transplants need to be watered once each week for four weeks. Skip a week if there is a one-inch rainfall during that particular week. You can mulch with composted leaves or with wood chips to help hold in moisture. Create a slight lip with soil around the planting hole to help when watering. The lip

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helps the water stay there long enough to soak in. You may find it helpful to mark the plants with tall markers to help you find them in mid to late summer or to identify them when weeding. What is readily apparent in May can be very hard to find in July or August.

Activity Description

Preparation for planting day

Arrange for volunteers to assist students with planting. Develop and distribute a planting schedule. Many options are possible when planting with students. Pairing older with younger students has proved very successful. Having students planting in pairs works well, too. Give each class/group about 30 minutes of planting time on the schedule. Contact the media and have a student team prepared to write articles and take photographs. Plan a celebration and invite the school community.

On planting day

Set up plants, trowels, water, and watering containers near the planting site. If desired, place plant markers where transplants will be located or mark planting zones according to plant height on the ground.



During the Planting

Once a class is at the planting site, begin by giving a planting lesson or demonstration. Describe the plant basics and what a plant needs to grow and thrive and give step-by-step planting instructions. Instructions can include locating a planting spot, digging a hole, removing the plant from the pot, separating roots (if needed), planting at the proper level, refilling the hole with soil, placing a marker, watering, and perhaps adding mulch.

Have students begin at the center of the garden and work out to avoid trampling the new transplants. After all the plants are in the ground, spread the remaining mulch between plants.

Step back and enjoy the work done and the future promise of a healthy landscape.

Extensions

- Look for opportunities to plant in parks and other public areas.
-  Use cameras to photo monitor the growth of your transplants by taking weekly photographs and measurements, making drawings, and recording when the plant first blooms.
-  Create a step-by-step digital instructional video to document plant transplanting techniques. Use this video to train future students on how to transplant plants properly.
- Write a song or poem about your planting experience.

Additional Resources

- Cohen, J. and E. Pranis. 1990. *GrowLab: Activities for growing minds*. Burlington: National Gardening Association.

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- Lovejoy, S. 1999. *Roots, shoots, buckets and boots: Gardening together with children*. New York: Workman Publishing Company.
- Richardson, B. 1998. *Gardening with children*. Newtown: The Taunton Press, Inc.

Assessments

- Draw and describe how to plant a transplant as a cartoon feature.
- Draw correct and incorrect versions of planting. Explain how to fix the incorrect drawing.