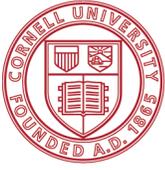


Organizing a Classroom Grow Station

It's amazing what we can do with small spaces devoted to gardening—both indoors and out. A small table, portable lidded tub, or shelf can be all the space you and your students need to teach and learn with plants and gardens in the classroom. Whether you are able to set up a specific space devoted to gardening in your classroom or tuck all the supplies under a table in a large tub, it is easy to keep it organized, accessible, and a dynamic addition to your classroom, if you keep a few things in mind.

MATERIALS

- **Soil tub:** any kind of shallow tub that allows you to keep potting soil on hand and accessible for your students to use; much easier than scooping soil from a bag
- **Spray bottles filled with water:** clean (i.e. not reused from cleaning or other chemical product); easier for small hands to water their own seedlings, establish an appropriate number of sprays to avoid over and under watering
- **Seeds:** consider plants that are easy to start indoors then transplant to an outdoor garden (i.e. tomatoes, squash, cucumbers) and those that are easy to grow indoors without requiring more space (i.e. lettuce, radishes, herbs)
- **Plastic yogurt, applesauce, pudding containers:** empty, clean with holes pre-punched in bottom for drainage (a nail works well for this)
- **Milk cartons:** collect from cafeteria, clean, cut tops off
- **Masking tape, white address labels, or popsicle sticks:** to label containers with student name, plant type, and/or date
- **Permanent markers:** for labeling containers
- **Observation journal:** while you may first think of this as a record book, encouraging drawings and pasted-in materials will make it interactive and useful; can be a shared class book or for individual students
- **Hand lenses:** to enhance observation, can be used well beyond the grow station
- **Light table with grow lights and timer:** this can be a simple one shelf operation to grow seedlings for experiments, taste testing (i.e. pea sprouts, lettuces), and for transplant to a larger container or in the ground outdoors
- **Books:** age appropriate books that can serve as reference material for your students' studies—non-fiction, fiction, class books, books written by students, etc.
- **Tools in easy to carry bins:** small trowels and cultivators are the basics, though depending on your needs you may wish to have gloves, bulb planters, hand weeders, a hoe, old pillows to kneel on, etc. Note: these tools will likely be used outdoors only, as the scale of most indoor gardening does not require them. We find that children value “real” tools on a smaller scale, as opposed to plastic imitation.
- **Miscellaneous bins and baskets:** to organize materials/tools and to allow students to transport what they need to a work station, whether it be indoors or out.



THE NEEDS OF SEEDS

Read each seed packet for key information on planting depth, seed spacing, and days to germination. Avoid feeling bogged down with information that seems “technical”—learn as you grow with your students!

For young children, use your pinky finger as a unit of measurement for planting depth. Some seeds may require a depth of a pinky nail, while others may go all the way to your first or second knuckle.

For tiny seeds in small hands, put seeds in an old spice container so they can be shaken evenly on top of soil.

For younger children, water seeds/seedlings with a spray bottle and a specific number of sprays per student to avoid over or under watering.

Always put a few more seeds than you actually need to grow in each container. This ensures at least 1 will germinate and you can always thin out seedlings as needed to make more space later.

Plants that can live in small containers or planting boxes, such as radishes, lettuce, and herbs, can be grown and harvested from an indoor garden with grow lights.

SEEDS TO START WITH

Six easy to grow plants from seed, that you can explore in class without having to transplant to a larger space: radish, beets, nasturtium, bean, lettuce, peas.

Six seeds that are easy to grow and transplant: lettuce, cabbage (family), tomato, spinach, cucumbers, squash.

Flower favorites that are easy to grow, and to transplant too: zinnia, nasturtium, marigold.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Daily connections and routines: How will the garden station be maintained? Will it be a daily routine that everyone somehow participates in or a class job for one or two students? What other daily connections and routines will you establish to keep your students engaged with their plants?

Garden etiquette: How will you establish classroom etiquette for the grow station, working with plants, etc.

Starting a grow station is easy. Many appreciate that, unlike an enormous garden, or greenhouse, a grow station can come together quickly, and store efficiently. A little advance preparation is all you need to get growing. Have an experience or photos you would like to share of your grow station? Contact us!