

Using Hart's Ladder – Ages 7 to 11

Children in this age group enjoy working with others and often begin participating in community activities and clubs. Their ability to reason and think systematically increases; thinking continues to be concrete, centered on what they can do or experience, but the ability to understand abstract ideas starts to develop in 9, 10, and 11 year olds. Children this age are highly verbal and with well-developed fine motor skills are able to express themselves in writing as well as drawing. They ask more fact-oriented questions (how? why?) and enjoy task-oriented projects. Many times they welcome challenges and enjoy finding solutions to what may be viewed as problems or program difficulties. For this reason, they may be ideal partners in devising a new garden program.

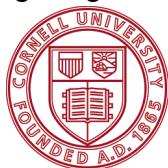
What kinds of decision-making and planning can children ages 7-11 dig into? Why limit youth involvement to interacting with the garden when it's being planted or once it already is? Seven to eleven year olds are developing new skills at a rapid rate and what better way to put them to use than in your gardening project! Think about all the tasks that are involved in the garden project: deciding what the garden's theme will be, charting garden expenses, figuring out the amount of wood chips needed, and writing letters for plant donations. Try involving youth this age from the beginning and be honest about all the known details as well as unknowns. Be realistic and allow enough time.

Planning the Garden

- Starting at the beginning and bringing young people up to speed. The first step to increasing participation is to involve youth from the beginning. If you have information about possible garden locations, existing funding or budgets, restrictions your school has placed on the garden, already donated plant material, put it out on the table from the very beginning.
- Build in opportunities to discuss challenges, restrictions, and barriers. Elicit feedback about possibilities for overcoming these challenges, and openly address the realities of the program environment (issues related to, for example, restrictions on what can be placed on school grounds, and what cannot). Brainstorm ideas for creative alternatives (stones placed to look like running water if water cannot be feasible on the site). Children at this age may welcome opportunities to provide creative substitutes!
- Be realistic about the amount of time it will take to complete the project with young people involved, especially if you're working with a large group like a grade level or entire school.

Deciding what the garden will be and what it will look like

- Ask young people all the questions necessary to generate a good vision of the what the garden will be: what will people do in the garden, who are those people, what types of plants will be grown, will the garden have a theme, how big should it be, what non-plant elements are needed.
 - Figuring out the details: Often adults are the ones laboring over



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how much topsoil, compost, or mulch to order. Why not encourage young people do the measurements and math?

Funding, supplies, and donations

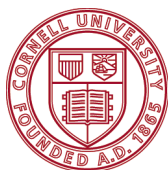
- Raising funds, gathering supplies, and requesting donations are all activities adults often presume young people aren't interested in or aren't able to participate in.
- What ways can young people help decide how to go about these tasks? Might they have a great fund raising idea? Perhaps they can write the donation request letter to a local nursery, or create a general request that can be duplicated and given to community members. Putting together request folders with information about the project, a wishlist, and general request letter are appropriate activities at this age. The sky's the limit with respect to enhancing the front of the folder with garden-related artwork.

In the Garden

- Installing the garden: How much pre-preparation do adults really have to do? Many young people arrive at their garden site to find a smooth, tilled, amended surface with paths in place. The process is much quicker with a rototiller and a couple parents with wheelbarrows but this can create a break in the feeling of ownership. Preparing a new garden is often a tough job. What better way to appreciate the work that goes into it that to participate? Youth can help to brainstorm ways to break it into manageable tasks so that it isn't overwhelming. Many hands make for lighter work.
- Maintaining the garden: Who decides what needs to be done, when it needs to be done, and who will do it? Often adults construct a framework: second graders weed, fourth graders water every other day. If the youth are new to garden they may have to get to know the tasks and time it takes to maintain a garden. After a period of experimentation try letting young people decide on schedules, tasks, and assignments.
- Uses of the garden: Are young people deciding what happens in the garden? Most gardens serve a main purpose: outdoor classroom, vegetable garden to supply a food pantry, beautification. When it comes to other uses, can youth make decisions about what they do there? Are young people free to visit the garden any time? Are they free to interact with the garden: weed or deadhead, pick beans, collect leaves for an art project?

Possible Activities:

- Set up at voting booth. At New Berlin Elementary, project coordinators narrowed down a list of low maintenance plants suitable for their area. Students had access to images and names of the plants over the course of several weeks. On "Election Day" each student was allowed to enter a mock voting booth, complete with curtain, and cast a vote for their top three plants. The fourth grade classes were in charge of tabulating the

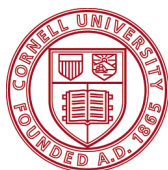


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data and presented the results to the school through a variety of graphs and charts.

- Hang an idea mural in a common area like a cafeteria, gym, or community room. Head the mural with one or two questions: What will people do in the garden? What will the garden look like? Provide markers near by so that young people can add an idea or picture when the mood strikes. Allow a time period of the mural (a week or two) and also allow time for the ideas generated to be compiled.
- At E.J. Russell Elementary, students involved in designing a new courtyard garden for the school took a field trip to a botanic garden. They were provided with journals with question prompts or guided observations. Students filled the journals out during and after the field trip generating ideas for their garden.
- Introduce “garden math” with concepts such as square feet and cubic yards. Once young people have the tools to make these calculations, allow them to take measurements of the garden site and calculate how much soil, compost, and/or mulch that’s needed.
- Rather than have a garden designer or landscape architect draw the plan for the garden, encourage an art class or artistic members of your group to draw both a planting plan (to scale on graph paper) and an artistic version of the garden plan. Engaging the assistance of a parent who is genuinely enthusiastic about children and youth participation, and willing to take the time to work with them to bring out their ideas, can be an ideal alternative.
- Keep a poster-sized budget posted where youth can add what’s been spent, what’s been earned, and the value of what’s been donated on a regular basis.
- Look online to see which local nurseries and garden centers. Narrow down the list to those that carry the type of plants you need and write request letters that describe the project, your need, and the plants you are requesting.



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