



Seed to Salad: Designing Quilt Block Salad Gardens

Overview

Often we grow vegetables in rows, grouping like vegetables together. There are many good reasons to do so and it can make a large garden easy to care for. However, why not add an art element to your gardening project by creating patterns out of the vegetables you're growing. The tapestry of lettuces—shades of green and red, lobed, oak leaf, and frilly—make a great palette for designing a garden as beautiful as it is tasty.

When working with youth in small plots (typically 3' x 3') it's difficult to achieve a grand picture like a detailed herd of horses. It is easy, however, to create a simple geometric pattern like those used in quilts.

Materials

- Large easel pad with gridlines
- Pencils, colored pencils, and large erasers
- Photographs or clip art of quilt blocks, color printed
- 8.5 x 11 photos of salad garden plants available for your gardens, color printed
- Masking tape

Preparation

A few things to prepare before design day...

Samples of Quilt Blocks and Geometric Patterns

If you are working with older youth, feel free to use the included clip art page as an example of a quilt block and geometric pattern. Ask youth to analyze the quilt blocks. You're looking for recognition that geometric shapes are put together to create patterns or simple pictures. You're also looking for youth to recognize that the shapes used are big (large circles rather than polka dots). In the garden, the larger the shape, the easier it is to see and the clearer your pattern will look.

Younger youth might benefit from a 3-D approach to introducing this concept. Some pre-K and kindergarten classrooms have great puzzles that teach shapes. If you're working in a school you may be able to borrow one of these. If not, consider cutting some large shapes out of scrap cardboard (squares, circles, triangles, diamonds). Before passing out the paper to design, allow youth to manipulate the large shapes or puzzle pieces to create patterns and designs.

Coding Plants Available for the Gardens

If at all possible it's best to know what seeds will be available before you begin designing. Depending on your program you may have to make this decision before the program starts. In after school programs run at the Ithaca Children's Garden we need to decide on and order seed before we even meet the youth that will be in the program. If this is the case with your group make sure to ask for feedback from your current group to help inform your purchases next year.

If you are working in a longer program that can begin in January or February, consider involving youth in determining what seeds to order. Check out the Campaign for Salad activity for ideas.

With either case, you'll need to prepare and code photos of the vegetables available before the design session. Since the photos will be posted on a wall for everyone to see, the bigger the better. Consider filling nearly all of an 8.5"x11" page with a photo of the vegetable and label it with the name and variety.

Once all your photos are printed sort them into three categories: use me for big spaces, use me for small spaces, and use me for borders. This will be different for each group however these guidelines might help with the sorting:

- *Use me for big spaces:* lettuces, spinach, beets
- *Use me for small spaces:* radishes, edible flowers, and any seed that's expensive and therefore you need to limit the amount used by each person
- *Use me for borders:* onions and carrots (their tall, slender habit makes them great for outlining)

The next step is to give each vegetable a number. Rather than write the name of each variety on their designs, youth will code them with numbers that reflect the vegetable to be grown in each area.



Preparing the Large Graph Paper

It's also best to know what garden areas you'll be using prior to designing. If you're working with a square or rectangular bed, there's not much preparation to do. Take a measurement of the beds and using the graph lined easel pad paper develop a scale such as 1 box = 1 inch. Draw an outline of the bed on the paper with a thick marker.

If your beds are irregular in shape or if not everyone's bed is the same shape and size this may take a bit longer. The same process is involved: measure the bed, determine the scale, and draw the outline.

Designing the Garden

Setting Up

- Hang all coded vegetable posters on a visible wall. Group them by category.
- Using masking tape, create an outline of a typical garden bed on the floor, actual size. This will help youth visualize scale if your paper is smaller than your plots are.
- Have your other supplies handy and ready to go.

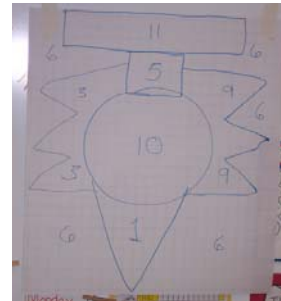
Designing the Garden (continued)

Designing

1. If youth will be working in small groups, break off into groups first.
2. Introduce the concept of quilt blocks and geometric patterns. Allow youth to create sample patterns using blocks, cutouts, or sketching on scrap paper.
3. Introduce the wall of vegetable photos. Ask if they know why each vegetable has a number. Discuss the concept of coding and keying the designs. Go over the definitions of *use for big spaces*, *use for small spaces*, and *use for borders*.



4. Depending on your group, you may want to design a garden together before breaking off into groups. Ask youth to suggest shapes and where to put them on the page. Once all the shapes are in place, ask for suggestions of vegetables for each area. Do this as a group with your paper propped on an easel so everyone can see.



5. Hand out the large graph paper, pencils, and erasers and let the designing begin. Allow plenty of time for individuals or groups to try out different ideas.
6. Wander around. Be sure to encourage youth to use big shapes.
7. Also make sure that groups include their names on their designs. Some groups like to create a key in the margin making it easy to equate the number code with the vegetable when planting out in the garden.
8. When everyone is finished, have individuals or pairs share their designs with the larger group.



Designing the Garden (continued)

A Note about Backgrounds

Many youth will be focusing on the design they are creating and forget to designate a vegetable for the background. In order to keep weeds down, it's best to fill the entire plot with veggies, leaving no bare soil. If youth have designed a sunburst for example, be sure they fill in the sky behind it.

