



LET'S GROW



TAPESTRY
ONLINE LEARNING
JOURNAL

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO

GROWING THINGS IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

This free document has been created to help childminders, nurseries and schools consider opportunities to grow more plants with their children.

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INTRODUCTION

At Let's Grow, our approach to growing things in educational settings is very simple... we want you to be successful whatever your circumstances, whether you have a huge school garden or a few pots in a yard.

If you're new to growing things but keen to give it a go, we think a great place to start is with creating a herb garden. Herbs create wonderful smells when we brush past them, give us beautiful shadows and shapes in their structure, provide resources for mud kitchen play and of course can taste amazing in our cooking and baking. For this Beginners Guide, we show you how to approach creating a beautiful herb garden and recommend some easy to grow herbs, that will give you and your children a positive growing experience.

Our guide is based around container planting in small spaces in order to make it accessible to all. If, however, you are lucky enough to have a site that is big enough for you to dedicate to growing in the ground, and you have time and resources to be able to support this, we also provide advice on creating your very own 'Allotment' space.

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TOOLS AND EQUIPMENT

You don't need lots of specialist equipment to get started with growing. Often some compost and a container of the right size is enough.

You can use a range of recycled vessels as planters, from old 'bags for life', to yoghurt pots. Just make sure that you add drainage holes to the bottom of solid containers, so that your plants don't rot.

A watering can is useful, but you can use a jug, or empty drinks bottles if you don't have one. You can use old tubs as plastic scoops for compost if you like, but compost is fine for children to touch with their hands, as long as they wash them afterwards. If you prefer to use a trowel they are easily available in child sizes.

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PREPARING YOUR OWN 'ALLOTMENT' SITE

If you are lucky enough to have a site that is big enough for you to dedicate to growing in the ground, and you have time and resources to be able to support this here is a guide to creating your very own "Allotment" space.

1. LOCATION

Take a look at your preferred site. Is it in the shade? Tree or building cover will prevent anything from growing well. Is it relatively flat? A steep slope can be difficult to manage, particularly for children. Does the ground often become saturated and muddy when it rains? If so, your crops may be at risk of rotting in the ground before you can grow them.

Starting a plot from scratch is hard work so make sure that you give yourself every chance of success by choosing the best spot to work on. Also think about how far you are going to have to carry your water, tools, bags of heavy compost.

2. SIZE

You will need:

Raised bed products which you can easily find online (2m x 3m is a manageable size).

When deciding upon the size of your plot you should consider what is realistic and manageable for you. You will need to be able to weed it every week in summer, and this takes time. Also consider if you want to use raised beds to edge your plot and make maintenance a little easier. Look around at raised bed products online, they tend to come in set dimensions, so this is worth considering before you start clearing. Consider 2m x 3m as a general guide for what is manageable. Although you may choose to create individual beds that are easier to reach into.

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3. PREPARING THE GROUND

You will need:

- A spade
- A rake
- String
- Scissors
- Canes
- Bags of compost
- Flattened cardboard boxes, with something heavy to pop on top, so they don't blow away

If you are starting from scratch this will be hard work, so don't take on clearing the whole plot in one go if that feels overwhelming. It's best to begin in Autumn and Winter, when there is less growth to contend with, and you will also be ready for growing straight away in Spring. You will need to mark out your plot first with string and canes. Then begin digging out any grass, roots, stones and clearing them to one side. You will need to dig at least the depth of a spade, turning the soil over and removing roots with your hands, leaving as much soil as possible.

When you have dug over and cleared a section, cover it in a layer of thick corrugated card (flattened boxes weighed down with something heavy). This will suppress any weeds and allow you to focus on the next section. After a week, uncover your dug over section and dig it over again, removing anything that you missed the first time, and anything that may have begun to grow. When you have cleared your whole plot, dig through some compost, rake it out so it's relatively level and cover it well with cardboard again until you are ready to begin growing.

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4. SOIL TYPE

You will need:

- Sand or gravel can be added to your soil, to break it up a little and prevent it from becoming waterlogged.
- pH kits can be bought to help you to test the pH of your soil.

It can be useful to know what type of soil you have, so that you know what you might add to the site to help it to grow better. When you dug the ground did you notice if it was very rocky/stony/gravelly/sandy? If so it might drain very freely and benefit from adding more compost, or a mulch (a layer of organic matter that will prevent the ground from drying out so easily). Or perhaps you noticed that the ground was very heavy/sticky/full of clay? If so your ground might benefit from digging through some sand or gravel to break up your soil a little and prevent it from becoming waterlogged. You can also buy pH kits that will help you to test your soil. This will give you an understanding of what might grow best on your plot as some plants prefer an acid or alkaline ground - most will do best in a neutral environment. Do not worry too much about testing, simply try things out and have fun doing so.

5. PLANTING YOUR CROPS

Now that your allotment site is ready, it's time to start planning what you're going to plant. Let's Grow Online Educational Resource features a comprehensive 'Get Growing Guide', which includes a helpful 'When To Do Things Calendar' to help with year round planning for planting and easy to follow instructions for growing a wide range of fruits and vegetables. Visit www.letsgrow.org.uk for more details.

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CREATING A HERB GARDEN

Herbs are such a wonderful resource in any setting and you do not need a lot of space in order to create a fabulous sensory experience. Herbs create wonderful smells when we brush past them, give us beautiful shadows and shapes in their structure, provide resources for mud kitchen play and of course can taste amazing in our cooking and baking. It is always wise to reiterate to children the importance of checking in with an adult before tasting anything from the garden.

Herbs do not all behave in the same way, because they come from different places in the world, with different growing conditions. It is easiest to respond to this if you grow your herbs in pots or containers. So if a plant loves very sandy soil, you can manage this easily, or if a plant is suffering in the cold you can move it to a sunnier spot.

Some herbs are very robust and will stand up well to enthusiastic play. Others are much more delicate and these can provide excellent opportunities to model gentle, caring handling of fragile plants. It is a good idea to buy a fairly established sturdy plant, rather than attempting to grow from seed. This means that you have an instant sensory garden. Don't snip off lots of leaves from your herbs straight away. Give them time to establish and only remove a few leaves at a time until you have a really vigorous healthy plant.

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You will need: (for container planting)

Chosen herbs

Containers a little larger than the current pot

Stones

Horticultural gravel mix

Compost

A trowel or your hand

Water

Whichever herbs you choose to grow, label them well, including the variety. Some varieties smell wonderful but taste not so great, others may look unspectacular but taste fabulous. Check out the detail on whichever variety you have chosen and keep a record to make the most of what you have.

Don't feel that you have to buy all of these herbs at once, these are just some suggestions. If these plants are not available to you, or they don't look so healthy at your local garden centre, or you just like the look of a different variety, go for it. These are just suggestions.

Rosemary - robust and beautiful. Try Rosemary Severn Sea and Rosemary Barbecue for contrast.

Bay - slower growing, beautiful leaves. Buy a good sized plant to begin with.

Sage - a robust plant. Lovely flowers for pollinators, try a couple of different sages like Tangerine Sage and Curly Sage for different experiences.

Mint - very rapid and vigorous growth. It's a lot of fun to grow different mints and experience the differences between them. Try applemint, chocolate mint, or peppermint.

Lemon Balm - very vigorous growth. Smells wonderfully lemony.

Lavender - fabulous for bees and other pollinators. Try smaller headed varieties like Hidcote, as well as the larger headed lavenders like French Lavender.

Fennel - beautiful structural forms and flowers.

Curry - a fabulous scent to enjoy in the garden, some plants do not taste so good!

Thyme - slower growing, try Magic Carpet and Orange Scented Thyme for contrast.

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Here is a list of more delicate herbs to grow with children. These can be grown from seed. Follow the packet instructions for advice.

Chives - quite robust once established and will grow quickly.

Coriander - some varieties are tougher than others, supermarket plants are unlikely to thrive.

Basil - some varieties are tougher than others, supermarket plants are unlikely to thrive.

Parsley - Some varieties are tougher than others, supermarket plants are unlikely to thrive.

Calendula - beautiful flowers, lovely in salads.

Nasturtium - beautiful flowers, lovely in salads, easy to grow.

When you've bought your plant, choose a good sized container to grow it in, something a little bigger than the pot that you bought the plant in will give it room to grow. Pop some stones in the bottom of the pot to stop the drainage hole from clogging up with soil. Make up a compost mix to suit your herb, usually a handful of horticultural gravel mixed through the compost will help the compost to drain more freely and not get too soggy (it's always worth checking the guidance on the label for the particular herb variety that you are planting for soil mix information). Using your hand or a trowel create a hole just big enough to plant your herb into, ensuring that its soil level is the same as in its original pot, and that you are not planting it any deeper. Tap the bottom of the pot with the herb in, holding the herb safely in your hand so that it doesn't drop onto the floor. Then pop it into the hole; gently pressing the compost around it, ensuring that there are no air pockets. Add some fresh compost if required to fill up the pot. Then water the plant at soil level, but not too much – just a little! Follow watering instructions for your chosen herb. Remember, it's a good idea to buy a good sized sturdy plant, rather than attempting to grow from seed. This means that you have an instant sensory garden.

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KEEN TO GROW MORE?

If this Beginner's Guide has wet your whistle, please visit www.letsgrow.org.uk to access more of our resources! From growing fruit and vegetables with confidence to providing hundreds of ideas for learning through play, we've got you covered!

ABOUT LET'S GROW

Engaging early years educational resources and family-friendly live events with nature & nurture at their core, led by CBeebies favourite gardener Mr. Bloom and the Let's Grow Nannies!

Brought to you by husband and wife team Mimi and Ben Faulks, a.k.a. CBeebies Mr. Bloom and co-creator of 'Mr. Bloom's Nursery,' Let's Grow brings to life an irresistible world of funky allotments and adorable fruit and vegetable babies. Little learners become immersed in nature and imaginative play exploring the wonderful themes of gardening, growing, nurture and healthy eating.

'Let's Grow for Educational Settings' presents a wealth of resources and tools meticulously crafted to meet the diverse needs of educators in nurseries, schools, and childminding settings. With over two decades of experience in creating world-class content, Let's Grow is the culmination of the mission to cultivate environments of positivity, nurture, and kindness, fostering profound learning experiences.

Designed specifically to support Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) education, Let's Grow provides a comprehensive array of resources and engaging content that elevate learning outcomes for children. Here's a glimpse of what awaits you:

Tailored Platform:

Let's Grow offers a bespoke online platform tailored to nurseries, schools, and childminders. Immerse yourself in interactive session plans, captivating videos, and hands-on activities meticulously aligned with the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum.

Rich Content:

The platform is a treasure trove of resources, featuring Mr. Bloom's practical and explorative sessions about the natural world, Bob and Flo's delightful gardening escapades, visits from the lovable vegetable and fruit babies, along with Mr. Bloom's beloved songs to inspire and entertain. Join us in creating nurturing environments that unlock the full potential of every child, leading to joyous learning experiences.

www.letsgrow.org.uk

