

TITLE | ADAPTING THE CURRICULUM

CATEGORY | Program

SUB-CATEGORY | Lesson Planning Resources

OVERVIEW | This resource contains suggestions on how to structure and adapt lessons from the Education Outside Curriculum (EOC).

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Introduction:

This resource contains suggestions for how to modify the EOC. It is particularly relevant to garden educators working with classes that are behind grade level and classes that have a large number of students that have experienced trauma or have an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Like the rest of the EOC, it focuses on curriculum rather than classroom management, as it is expected that garden educators will create their own classroom culture and management style.

Overview:

When working with elementary school students consistency is crucial. Rituals and classroom culture should be clear, consistent, and concise. Lessons that create trust between the garden educator and students are necessary before content can be introduced. Some students may need more hands-on or physically active lessons, and the garden educator should feel free to modify lessons to create an engaging, active, and fun classroom culture that fits the needs of the students. The garden educator can also dive deeper into specific learning objectives in order to ensure student comprehension. Some concepts and activities may need to be modified for students that are reading below grade level or are not being taught science inside the classroom. Best Practices for Teaching in the School Garden resource is a great place to find additional resources supporting the development and practice of strong classroom culture. The garden educator should be prepared to use both the curriculum and best practices to create robust outdoor lessons.

Structuring the Year:

Get to know your students and let your students get to know you. The garden educator should not feel obligated to jump into science-heavy curriculum right away. The garden educator should take time at the beginning of the year to get to know students through community building activities and should include these activities in their semester or year long lesson planning. It is also important to create or review Garden Agreements with your students. This will often take a full class to establish, review, and practice. Please see the *Best Practices for Building Classroom Culture*, linked in the Table of Contents, for suggestions on how to structure this class and practice throughout the year. If you are new to your students, we recommend meeting students inside (if possible) on the first day or before classes in the garden start to explain what students will be learning outdoors, review expectations, answer questions, and build excitement.

Splitting lessons

Most lessons are broken into at least two activities. If there are frequent class disruptions, the garden educator can plan to break up a single lesson into multiple lessons by dividing Activity 1 and Activity 2 (or Activity 3). If you have two educators/adults in the class, we recommend dividing the class into two groups with one group doing Activity 1 and the other doing Activity 2. Groups then switch halfway through the lesson. Breaking up the groups can help mitigate disruptions and gives students more focused attention from the educator.

Substitutions

Certain classes may need to be physically active throughout the class. The garden educator can utilize the following activities to break up the lesson:

- Garden Jobs
- Cooking
- Art
- Games
- Community building lessons

Alternatively, the garden educator can bring the lesson indoors to complete the lesson in a more focused environment.

Structuring Lessons:

Introductions

It's important to greet your students in a similar fashion and location for each lesson. We suggest checking in with students to see how they are feeling, if they are ready for learning, and to demonstrate care and build relationships. A helpful tool for creating consistency at the beginning of each lesson is incorporating two-minute challenges or sit spots (see *Best Practices for Building Classroom Culture*, linked in the Table of Contents). Two-minute challenges get students engaged in the material quickly, providing a question, challenge, or mystery connected to the lesson of the day. They are frequently written into lesson introductions in the EOC, and can be adapted or changed by the garden educator to meet the needs of their students. Incorporating these introductions can take a significant amount of time away from lessons in the beginning of the year, but the time required will decrease with consistent practice.

Materials

It's important to consider your materials ahead of each lesson. Some lessons include a book suggestion, require you to have specific materials like seeds, or print worksheets. We suggest setting up all materials prior to the lesson. You can envision how you want students interacting with the materials and then set up systems that allow students to use materials in a safe manner and minimize clean up. For example put all shovels in the same bucket with a label that shows a shovel. Support student learning in how to use and put away shovels. In addition, if the materials listed in the EOC are not available, the garden educator can often substitute other materials. More information on how to set up and use materials with students can be found in the *Best Practices for Building Classroom Culture*, linked in the Table of Contents.

Instructions

Garden educators should list instructions on the board. Instructions should be legible and written at the appropriate reading level, and should include no more than 3-5 steps. For classes that struggle with listening to instructions outside, garden educators can start lessons inside the classroom.

Key Terms

Most lessons include suggested key terms. The garden educator can choose to introduce content without the suggested key terms if necessary. If an educator decides to use the key terms included in the lesson we recommend writing them on the board or other display area for students to reference throughout the lesson.

Garden Exploration

Garden educators should give students clear expectations for garden exploration. This includes defined garden boundaries, specified exploration time, and focused questions to direct student observations while exploring (*Note: These questions are often included in the curriculum as “Focus”, “Science” or “Guiding Questions”*).

Garden Jobs

Garden educators should create consistent systems for garden jobs that work for their site and should spend time reviewing each job throughout the year so that students understand the system and expectations. Garden jobs often include watering, trash collection or sweeping, planting, dead heading (for older students), and digging in the dig zone (an area for students to practice using shovels and other tools).

Science Notebooks and Worksheets

- **Notebooks:** It can take a significant amount of time for students to set up science headers and tables in science notebooks. The garden educator may find it helpful to use worksheets rather than science notebooks. The garden educator can also create a folder for each student’s worksheets.
- **Worksheets:** The garden educator should ask classroom teachers about the reading level of students. Some worksheets may need to be modified if students are below grade level in reading.