

Troubleshooting a Summer Garden Program

Resource Sheet



How do you get youth to return to the garden each week?

- Whether or not there is a stipend for the kids, having them fill out an application of some sort will give them a sense of the responsibility involved in participating in a garden program.
- Help the youth develop ownership over the garden (see below).
- Rotate tasks each day, so youth develop skills in many areas and stay interested.
- Plan each week, informing youth of the different activities (planting, thinning, weeding, building compost piles, identifying insects in all life forms, art projects) that will occur.
- Leading into the next point, involve parents so that they can support youth in being a regular participant.

How do you encourage parental involvement?

- Invite parents to participate! You may even require parents to participate in a limited number of times throughout the season.
- As with any volunteers, it is best to find specific tasks for them so that they feel like they can participate in a meaningful way. Ask parents to help prepare a snack or share a story or idea with the kids.
- Find out their specific skills (carpentry, irrigation repair, planting expertise) and have them lead a garden session utilizing their talents. Realize that everyone has a skill that touches gardening. Caring for plants and nurturing children are very similar.

How do you encourage youth to feel a sense of ownership over the garden?

- Involve youth in each and every aspect of caring for the garden.
- Have them spend time learning about a special area of the garden (its plants, soil, insect life) and quietly journal changes in that area over the season.
- Gardening is not just about the garden, but also about the relationships of the people caring for the garden. Use garden-themed team-building activities to bring the group together and encourage a sense of leadership among the youth.

How do you deal with heat and children in the garden?

- Hold your program early in the morning before it gets too hot.
- Do the most labor intensive (such as weeding or digging) tasks early in the day.
- Locate a place that is shaded, either in the garden or in an adjacent building that the group can take a break.
- Grow shade structures such as bean or gourd teepees and sunflower/morning-glory houses that serve as special retreats for kids
- Encourage kids to bring water bottles, or write into your budget to buy water bottles for the kids to have in the garden. We recommend keeping these in the shed or storage area after each session, as opposed to the youth taking them home and possibly forgetting to bring them back.
- End some sessions with adults holding the hose, allowing youth to run under it if they wish (This option should be checked out first with parents, for their permission).

- Styrofoam visors make great shade and nametags when decorated with markers. Like the water bottles, keep these at the garden for each session.
- Keep sunscreen at the garden!

Most summer programs are only one or two days a week. How do you ensure that the garden is being watered and maintained on those other days?

- Youth who live close to the garden can work in pairs and have assigned days that they water the garden.
- Have other members of the community work to help care for the garden.
- Consider asking parents for support with watering and maintenance.

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