

School Garden for Wildlife



Introduction

In the book *Jo MacDonald Had a Garden*, author Mary Quattlebaum introduces children to the plants and creatures in a garden and shows how to create gardens that benefit both people and wildlife. In this activity, children plant native plants in containers or small school garden and observe their effect on wildlife.

Materials Needed

- ◆ Two or more large flower pots or patch of soil in school garden
- ◆ Soil from plant store
- ◆ Watering can and spade
- ◆ One or two coneflower plants
- ◆ Packet of sunflower seeds to plant
- ◆ One scientific notebook per child
- ◆ Pencils
- ◆ Magnifying glass

Key Concepts

- ◆ Using scientific resources combined with observations, plan and conduct a simple systematic observation.
- ◆ Use simple instruments such as magnifier and ruler to gather data and extend the senses.
- ◆ Use knowledge and evidence (data) to formulate explanation.
- ◆ Communicate investigations that might be drawn or spoken as well as written.

For standards correlation please see our website.

Procedure

1. Read the book and point out, through How to Be a Gardener Like Jo in back matter
2. Tell children that they are scientists and will be creating a garden to help wildlife and making careful observations of the insects, birds, and animals that visit.
3. Read the descriptions of sunflowers and coneflowers in back of book. With children's help, plant the coneflower in big pot (first pointing out its roots, stem, leaves, flowers, fruit, and seeds) or in garden. Next, have children look carefully at sunflower seeds and then plant them in the other container or in garden.
4. Place containers outdoors in sunny spot and water. Observe plants carefully for 5 minutes. Did any wildlife visit?
5. Have children date the first page of scientific notebook, write down what they planted, and list any creatures that visited and what creature did.
6. Water and observe plants (from distance and then close up) every 2-3 days. With each visit, ask children to put date at top of new page in scientific notebook, to record any changes in plant, and to list the name and activity of any wild creatures that visit. They can also draw what they see. Every week measure plant growth with ruler and observe with magnifying glass to note small insects or their eggs on plants.
7. At the end of two months, discuss findings. Did the number and types of wildlife increase over time? How were creatures using the plants (food, nectar, shelter/resting spots, places for egg laying)? Would students conclude that their container gardens helped wildlife? Point out that even small things, like planting certain types of flowers, can help local wildlife.
8. Ask children what they liked best about the garden experience. What was most/least interesting?

Nature Connections

- ◆ As a class, share your observations, as citizen scientists, with the National Wildlife Federation's Wildlife Watch program. <http://www.nwf.org/WildlifeWatch/obs.aspx>
- ◆ Visit a large garden and make observations there. Ask children if they see the same types of wild visitors as for their container garden? Any different ones? Overall, are there more or fewer visitors?

Additional Resources

National Wildlife Federation: How to Create a Schoolyard Habitat

<http://www.nwf.org/Get-Outside/Outdoor-Activities/Garden-for-Wildlife/Schoolyard-Habitats.aspx>

National Wildlife Federation: How to Create a Backyard Habitat -<http://www.nwf.org/Get-Outside/Outdoor-Activities/Garden-for-Wildlife.aspx>

