Sensory Gardens for Special Education Students

Sensory garden benefits may include:

- Improves fine and gross motor skills
- Encourages communication and social skills
- Increases self-esteem
- Promotes responsibility
- Stimulates sensory awareness
- Enhances creativity
- Promotes “hands-on” and “multi-sensory” learning
- Helps reduce stress, anxiety, and frustration
- Helps reduce aggressive behaviors
- Can help enhance and support concepts taught in the classroom
- Adapts to many types of curriculum
- Provides opportunities for investigative learning
- Provides a non-threatening environment
- Creates common ground between students

Tips for your sensory garden:

- Make safety your top priority
- Make sure the garden is accessible and inclusive to all students
- Use tools suited to children or specially adapted tools for children with special needs
- Plan garden related activities often, but for short time periods
- Use plants that are durable and easy to grow
- Let your students participate as much as possible
- Design your garden to meet your student’s needs.
- Keep safety in mind
- Provide plenty of adult helpers
- Have plenty of fluids and sun protection available
- Partner special education students with mainstream students
- Allow time for children to adjust to the sights and smells of the garden
- Balance jobs that have instant results, such as weeding and harvesting; with jobs that have longer term results, such as transplanting or sowing seeds.
- Demonstrate gardening tasks for the students before they leave the classroom and once they are in the garden
Curriculum connections:

MATH
*How fast does dill grow? – Measure and graph the growth rates of dill plants, make size comparisons
*When will a seed germinate? – Use seed catalog/seed packet information and math to predict when a seed will germinate and how long it will take to mature, predict when a seed would need to be planted in order to be ready for a chosen holiday.
*Compare the sizes of herb seeds?
*Observe and record the air and soil temperatures in your class herb garden?
*Calculate the weight and volume of soil when it is wet and when it is dry.
*Calculate how many sage plants will fit into a 6 ft. x 6 ft. garden
*Use plants to help you learn about taking measurements
*Learn about fractions by using herbs for cooking

SCIENCE
*Dead or alive? – use basil plants to compare the difference between living and non-living things
*What is pH? – How does pH affect the smell and taste of basil, sage, and oregano
*What happens if I water thyme plants with soda or tomato juice?
*Why do herbs smell? – investigate what parts of herb plants cause them to smell
*Plant identification – press and label various herb plants, draw and diagram the parts of a leaf
*Plant life cycles – plant seeds and learn about reproductive life cycles as they grow

WRITING/LANGUAGE ARTS
*What role have herbs played in the development of modern day medicine? – have the students interview a pharmacist or doctor about the role herbs have played in the developing of medicine, have them write a written report or give an oral report to share what they have learned.
*Compare and contrast the facts and fiction about various herb plants.
*Write a description of the plants growing in your garden
*Write a letter to your local extension service or botanic garden asking a “plant-related” question?
*Learn to use the library or internet by researching a certain type of herb or plant
HEALTH
* What role can herbs play in healthy eating?
* Can herbs be used to spice up vegetable dishes?
* Use herbs to learn about how to harvest and preserve food?
* Learn about cooking with herbs
* Learn about the role herbs have played in the development of medicine?

SOCIAL STUDIES
* What role have herbs played in different cultures?
* How are herbs used around the world?
* What role have spices played in ancient civilizations?
* Do herbs have economic uses? – examine the ingredient labels of various household products to determine if herbs are listed in the ingredients, visit the grocery store and look for products that use herbs

CULTURAL ARTS – music, art, drama
* Paint or draw various herbs and plants
* Perform a play that depicts the life cycle of a sunflower or other plants
* Does Basil like Beethoven? – learn how music affects plant behavior and growth
* Make or decorate clay pots for a school plant sale
* Develop advertising skills by designing marketing materials and plant labels for a school plant sale.
* Write the lyrics for songs that teach about the parts of a plant or the life cycle of a plant. Perform the songs for your school.
* Decorate rain barrels for a school plant sale or for use by your school.

Contact Information

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