

HANDBOOK

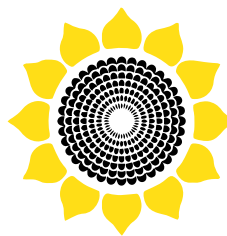
Growing Together:
Inter-Generational Collaboration
in Community Gardens



Nordplus



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GROWING TOGETHER: GUIDEBOOK

SUPPORTING SEN STUDENTS THROUGH GARDENING AND NATURE



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This comprehensive guide will include methodologies for teaching SEN students practical gardening skills while fostering teamwork and sustainability awareness.



1. Welcome, Gardener!

Thank you for sharing your time, knowledge, and love of gardening. This handbook is here to help you guide students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in simple, joyful, and meaningful ways.

You don't need to be a teacher – just a kind, patient gardener who enjoys helping others grow.

Your role:

- Be a guide and a friend.
- Encourage learning through doing.
- Help everyone feel safe, calm, and proud.

Throughout this handbook, you will find practical ideas and gentle guidance to help you feel confident in this role.

2. What Makes Gardening So Special?

Gardening is a gentle teacher. It brings learning to life through touch, smell, sound, taste, and sight.

In the garden, students can:

- Feel soil and seeds in their hands.
- Smell herbs and flowers.
- Hear birds, bees, and the wind.
- Watch plants grow and change.
- Taste the food they helped grow.

Gardening also teaches patience, teamwork, and care – the same values that keep a community strong.

These experiences are especially meaningful for SEN students, as they offer learning that is concrete, calming, and deeply engaging.

3. Understanding SEN Students

Every learner is different. Some may need help with movement or communication; others may need quiet time or extra repetition.

Simple ways to support them:

- Speak clearly and show what to do.
- Give one instruction at a time.
- Be calm and kind – never rush.

If a student seems unsure, let them watch first or do a smaller part of the task. You can always say: “Let’s do it together.”

Understanding and flexibility are the foundation of successful gardening sessions.

4. Preparing for a Session

Each gardening session can follow three gentle steps:

1. *Gather and Welcome*

- Meet in a calm, familiar space.
- Say what will happen today.
- Show the tools and plants.
- Let everyone touch, smell, or look at what you’ll use.

2. *Do and Explore*

- Demonstrate slowly.
- Help each student find a task that suits them – digging, watering, drawing, or watching insects.
- Encourage teamwork and conversation.
- Enjoy the sounds, smells, and feel of nature together.

3. *Rest and Reflect*

- Sit quietly to rest, listen to birds, or share what was learned.
- Ask: “What did you notice today?” or “What did you like best?”
- End with thanks and smiles.

This simple structure helps create predictability while still allowing freedom and creativity.

5. Sensory Experiences in the Garden

Gardening is a full-body, full-heart experience. Use all the senses!

- Touch – Feel soil, seeds, leaves, bark; make mud prints or sand drawings.
- Smell – Crush mint, basil, or lavender leaves; guess the scent.

- Sight – Notice colors, shapes, shadows, and growth changes.
- Sound – Listen for birds, bees, rustling leaves, or watering sounds.
- Taste – Taste herbs, lettuce, berries, or tea made from plants (safely!).

Encourage gentle observation, for example:

“Close your eyes and listen.”

or *“Smell this leaf — what does it remind you of?”*

Sensory activities help students feel present, calm, and connected.

6. Connecting to Nature and Each Other

Your presence and care matter as much as the plants. When you garden together:

- Share your own memories of gardens, harvests, or seasons.
- Let students express feelings through words, gestures, or drawings.
- Notice beauty together – a flower blooming, a worm in the soil, a sunset.
- Encourage gentle conversation, listening, and asking questions about what others observe.
- Celebrate small achievements together – a seed planted, a leaf identified, or a new smell discovered.

“The garden grows when we all take care of it – and we grow too.”

Connecting with nature also helps students develop empathy, patience, and mindfulness. Simple acts, like watering a plant carefully or observing a snail, can teach respect for living things and a sense of shared responsibility. By working alongside experienced gardeners, students can learn from example, feel supported, and experience intergenerational friendship in a calm, nurturing environment.

These shared moments build trust, strengthen relationships, and help students feel safe, valued, and connected – both to nature and to each other.

7. Flexible Activity Ideas

You can adjust the time – some sessions may take 20 minutes, others a few hours. Go at a pace that feels right, and always watch for students’ energy levels and engagement.

- Planting and Caring – Sow seeds, make name tags, talk about what plants need, and observe how plants grow over time.
- Exploring the Senses – Create a touch box, smell trail, or colour collage to encourage curiosity and sensory awareness.

- Discovering Nature – Look for insects, birds, or soil life; start compost; notice patterns and relationships in the ecosystem.
- Tasting and Cooking – Harvest herbs or vegetables and make tea or a simple salad; explore flavours safely and discuss where food comes from.
- Creating with Nature – Paint stones, make leaf prints, decorate garden spaces, or build small nature-inspired crafts.
- Sharing and Celebrating – Host a harvest day, invite families, sing together, or share stories about the garden.

Tip for mentors: Let students choose which activity they want to try. Flexibility fosters confidence, autonomy, and engagement.

8. Keeping Everyone Safe and Comfortable

Safety and comfort are the foundation of a positive gardening session.

- Always check tools are safe and clean.
- Provide gloves, sun hats, and appropriate clothing.
- Keep drinking water nearby.
- Avoid toxic or sharp plants.
- Have a quiet, shaded area for rest if anyone needs a break.
- Wash hands after gardening.

Most importantly, maintain a calm, gentle, and encouraging atmosphere. Smile, notice effort, and celebrate small successes – the environment you create is just as important as the activities themselves.

Tip for mentors: Encourage students to speak up if they feel tired, unsure, or need help. Respecting these moments builds trust.

9. Reflection

After each session, take a moment to pause and reflect:

- What went well today?
- Who seemed happiest or most confident?
- Did anyone need extra support or encouragement?
- What did you learn from the students?

Write a few notes, take a photo, or record a quick observation. These reflections help you tailor future sessions and capture the small, meaningful moments that show growth and connection.

Tip for mentors: Reflection doesn't need to be long – even a few sentences or a simple smiley rating can guide your next session.

10. Growing Together

Gardening is more than growing plants – it's about growing confidence, curiosity, and a sense of belonging in young people.

"In the garden, we are all learners and all teachers."

By being present, patient, and encouraging, you help students feel safe to explore, take risks, and celebrate their achievements. Every seed planted, every story shared, and every moment of care contributes to their growth – and yours.

Thank you for bringing patience, warmth, and wisdom into every gardening session. Together, we grow more than gardens; we grow people, relationships, and community.

11. Good Practice Examples from Partner Countries

To illustrate how the principles and methods described in this handbook work in real life, this section presents selected examples from project partners in Finland, Lithuania, and Estonia. These case studies highlight how schools, community organizations, and local initiatives have implemented gardening activities for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN), often in collaboration with older mentors or volunteers.

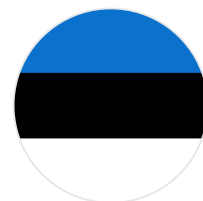
The examples show a variety of approaches, from sensory-based activities and experiential learning to inclusive programs that foster teamwork, environmental awareness, and intergenerational connection. They are intended as inspiration: while every garden, group, and learner is unique, these practices demonstrate creative ways to apply the "Growing Together" approach in different contexts.

Mentors can use these examples to spark ideas, adapt activities to local conditions, or see practical ways of integrating gardening into inclusive education programs.



11.1. Examples from Partner Countries: Estonia

Context of SEN Education and Gardening Initiatives



In Estonia, the education system has embraced inclusive education as a national priority, with a strong legal and policy framework supporting the integration of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) into mainstream schools. While specialized schools remain essential for some learners, inclusive classrooms and differentiated instruction are becoming increasingly common. The Estonian approach places emphasis on personalized learning paths, holistic development, and the use of nature-based and experiential methods, especially in early and basic education.

Gardening and outdoor learning are gaining recognition in Estonian schools as valuable tools for developing life skills, supporting emotional well-being, and encouraging environmental awareness. Many schools—particularly those participating in the Green School (Roheline Kool) programme—maintain school gardens or collaborate with local farms. However, as in many countries, the depth and consistency of these practices vary, and there is still untapped potential to integrate gardening more systematically as a pedagogical method, especially for SEN learners.

Urban community gardening has also grown steadily in Estonia, most notably in Tallinn with the municipal funding and dedicated staff. In 2025, the City of Tallinn supported the creation or development of 39 community gardens, 95 educational gardens, and 10 urban gardening projects, with a total budget of €343,880. In Tartu, there are seven community gardens, the biggest being grassroots initiative Tartu Maheaed on 10 hectares. All these gardens serve multiple functions: food production, environmental education, cultural exchange, and social inclusion. There is increasing recognition that such community-led initiatives can become valuable partners for schools, providing real-life learning contexts and fostering intergenerational and intercultural interaction.

Role of Tartu Maheaed

Tartu Maheaed is one of the largest and most active urban community gardens in Estonia, located in the Annelinn district of Tartu. Founded in 2011 as a citizen-led initiative, it has grown into a well-organized community garden with over 500 members. It provides individual plots for urban residents and promotes organic gardening, biodiversity, and local food culture. Importantly, Tartu Maheaed has also become a hub for gardening education, social inclusion, and volunteering. For several years, Tartu Maheaed has offered schools hands-on gardening activities that integrate practical skills into the curriculum within a safe, supportive environment.

As the main partner in the Growing Together project, Tartu Maheaed plays a key role in piloting nature-based lesson plans and mentoring formats. Elderly gardeners, many with long-term gardening experience, share traditional knowledge with students and teachers, while adapting to modern SEN teaching practices. Tartu Maheaed continues to position itself as a living classroom and a model of inclusive, community-based environmental education. Its long-term vision includes closer collaboration with SEN institutions, the development of universally designed gardening tools and spaces, and the integration of gardening into formal curricula through co-creation with educators.

11.2. Examples from Partner Countries: Finland

Gardening Education in Finland



Although there are some nature-oriented schools in the country, such as Mahnala environmental school, nature-based methods and gardening are not yet a systematic part of everyday basic education. Their importance for learning, well-being and sustainability skills is, however, widely recognised. Several networks and associations support schools and early childhood education in this area. The LYKE -network, for example, brings together nature schools and environmental education organisations across Finland and provides teachers with tools to strengthen sustainable lifestyles and children's relationship with nature.

Many schools have small gardens or raised beds, but practices vary. Gardening is part of the boarding school tradition at Anna Tapio school, and in Steiner schools cultivation and nature have long been integrated into teaching. In most mainstream schools, however, gardening depends on teachers' interests and local opportunities. Separate nature schools complement school activities with experiential programmes. For example, Tampere nature school Korento organises activities also for pupils with special educational needs, while Pihlajamäki nature school in Helsinki focuses on school gardening. In Finland, education for pupils with special needs is mainly integrated into the general system. Inclusiveness is increasingly emphasised when planning support, although some pupils still study in small groups or special schools when necessary.

Green Care principles are also gaining ground. At the Kumpula School Garden in Helsinki, Vihreä Oksa Werstas offers young people rehabilitative gardening workshops that build skills and social inclusion; 100% of participants reported improved social skills. Finland also has Camphill communities, where communal living, biodynamic farming and the inclusion of adults with special needs go hand in hand.

The Role of Teisko Salonsaari Cooperative

The Teisko Salonsaari Cooperative has restored a 1920s parsonage and its surrounding island in Teisko, Tampere, into a lively meeting place. Activities are financed through rentals, catering, events, accommodation, and since 2025, vegetable sales.

The grounds include a market garden, edible forest garden, berry and herb plots, and forest pastures maintained with Haltijan tila -farm, where animals support landscape care. Cultivation follows biodynamic and ecological methods, and beekeeping is also practised. Ecosystem services are considered from soil microbes to pollinators. gardening and environmental education are central, implemented with summer workers, school groups and projects.

11.3. Examples from Partner Countries: Lithuania



Context of SEN Education and Gardening Initiatives

In Lithuania, the education system has made steady progress in supporting students with Special Educational Needs (SEN), both in specialized institutions and increasingly through inclusive programs in mainstream schools. While inclusive education is gaining traction in national policy and practice, there remains significant potential to expand the use of experiential, student-centered learning methods, especially those rooted in nature and sustainability.

Many Lithuanian schools already include gardening activities as part of their educational programs, typically within life skills, natural sciences, or extracurricular projects. However, the integration and consistency of these initiatives vary. There is growing recognition that gardening could be cultivated more systematically across schools, not only as an environmental or vocational activity, but as a tool for inclusive education and student well-being.

Urban community gardening has also gained momentum in Lithuania, particularly in Vilnius neighborhoods such as Antakalnis and Pilaitė, where residents have established shared gardens. These spaces promote sustainability, community engagement, and intergenerational connection. While community gardening is still emerging as a structured educational resource, there is significant opportunity to build stronger links between schools and such initiatives—benefiting both students and the broader public.

Role of Vilnius Verkiai School

Vilnius Verkiai School – Multifunctional Center is one of the most experienced and innovative SEN institutions in Lithuania. It serves students with a wide range of needs, including intellectual and developmental disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, and multiple learning challenges. The school is committed to creating an inclusive and supportive environment where students can build life skills, self-confidence, and independence through practical, experience-based learning.

Importantly, Vilnius Verkiai School has its own garden, which serves as both an educational space and a therapeutic environment. Students participate in planting, nurturing, and harvesting activities adapted to their individual abilities. This hands-on engagement promotes sensory development, motor skills, responsibility, and emotional regulation.

As a key partner in the Growing Together project, the school played a leading role in testing and refining the guidebook's lesson plans. Its teachers collaborated closely with elderly mentors, facilitating a welcoming and structured environment for intergenerational learning. Through this approach, students gained not only horticultural knowledge but also meaningful connections with older adults, building social and emotional competencies alongside practical skills.

Vilnius Verkiai School continues to develop its gardening program as a long-term element of its curriculum, setting a strong national example of how inclusive education can be enriched by outdoor learning and community collaboration.

Role of Knowledge Code



VšĮ “Žinių kodas” (Knowledge Code) supports gardening as inter-generational learning and adult education in practice. The organisation helps create a calm, welcoming space where gardening sessions run smoothly and people feel comfortable from the first minute. It supports planning, prepares the garden setting, and ensures tools and materials are ready, so the focus stays on doing and learning.

Learning happens through simple, visible tasks that build confidence step by step: planting, watering, composting, weeding, harvesting, and basic care routines. VšĮ “Žinių kodas” also supports gardeners in a mentoring role, with clear guidance and an easy-to-use Guide, so mentoring feels natural. The aim is friendly teamwork where skills and everyday wisdom are shared with the younger generation in the most practical way: side by side in the garden.

12. The Four Pillars of Special Educational Needs (SEN):

The Four Pillars of Special Educational Needs (SEN):

Learning difficulties and intellectual development include both specific learning difficulties (such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia) and intellectual disabilities ranging from mild to profound.

Sensory, speech, and physical disabilities: these include visual and hearing impairments, physical mobility limitations, and various speech disorders.

Behavioural and emotional disorders: persistent or recurring difficulties in regulating behaviour, managing emotions, and maintaining social relationships that affect everyday functioning.

Exceptional giftedness: abilities in one or more areas (such as mathematics, music, languages, or creativity) that significantly exceed the typical level of peers.

The common denominator across all these categories is the need for an adapted learning environment, teaching methods, or support specialists so that everyone can learn in the way that suits them best.

Neurodivergence is part of human diversity. Although we have grouped special needs under four pillars for clarity, neurodivergence is like a network that extends across these boundaries. It includes differences in learning, behaviour, and emotional experience that are often interconnected.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is characterized by differences in self-expression, social communication, and sensory processing.

Recommendation: "Say exactly what to do, and allow time to respond."

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) affects concentration, impulsivity, energy levels, and emotional regulation.

Recommendation: "One step at a time."

Tourette syndrome is a neurological condition involving involuntary movements or sounds (tics).

Recommendation: "Ignore the tics, focus on the activity."

Anxiety disorders involve persistent, excessive, and intense worry that interferes with everyday activities.

Recommendation: "Maintain routines, soften transitions, and offer calming activities."

In summary: In our gardening activities, we focus on the learner's actual needs and well-being rather than on medical diagnoses. Our role in the garden is to provide support wherever there is a barrier, regardless of the official label attached to it. Every learner is different—whether the differences appear in communication style, the need for quiet, or the number of repetitions required. The garden is an excellent place where we can create an environment that supports everyone, valuing effort and working together.

13. “Growing Together” Gardening Session Planning Model

Sessions bring together SEN students aged 12–18 and elderly experienced gardeners (hereafter referred to as **teachers**) to work collaboratively in the garden, fostering inclusion, mutual respect, environmental education, practical gardening skills, and emotional connection through shared hands-on activities.

Learning Outcomes

By participating in a session, students will:

- Use all their senses to notice, explore, and describe elements of the natural environment.
- Take safely and confidently part in practical outdoor gardening activities.
- Recognise how organically grown food supports a healthy body and well-being.
- Demonstrate basic understanding of ecosystems, healthy soil, biodiversity, and how organic gardening helps protect the local environment.
- Communicate and interact positively with others through working together in the garden.
- Show increased confidence by sharing responsibility and contributing meaningfully to tasks.

Intergenerational Roles

- Elderly gardeners=teachers act as:
 - Demonstrators of traditional gardening skills
 - Gentle guides and co-workers
 - Emotional anchors through calm presence
- SEN students act as:
 - Active gardeners with supported autonomy
 - Learners and contributors
 - Caretakers of shared garden space

Assessment

Assessment is informal and supportive, focusing on students’ participation, well-being, and interaction rather than performance. It combines mentor observation of intergenerational engagement with a simple student self-assessment activity included in each lesson, where learners reflect on how they felt during the session by choosing from three options (e.g. I liked it, It was fine, It was difficult / I needed help). This accessible approach supports reflection, emotional awareness, and inclusive feedback to inform future sessions.

To support mentors and teachers in translating these principles into practice, the **“Growing Together” Gardening Session Planning Model** offers a clear yet flexible structure for designing and delivering sessions. The model brings together learning outcomes, roles, sensory engagement, and safety considerations into a single planning framework. It is intended as a guiding tool rather than a fixed formula, allowing mentors to adapt each session to the abilities, interests, energy levels, and emotional needs of the participants while maintaining consistency and purpose across activities.

Breakdown Timeframe (flexible)	Activities	Purpose
Arrival & emotional regulation 5-15 min	• Get acquainted with each student by name and with preferred greeting (smile, handshake, hug). • Explain the session in a simple and slow manner. Ask if they understand. • Offer sensory introduction: ◦ Listening to garden sounds ◦ Smelling something from the garden (mint, parsley?) ◦ Walk slowly around the garden, get used to the environment	Help students feel safe, calm, and prepared. Supports transitions, reduces anxiety
Clear introduction & visual demonstration 10 min	• State the task and explain work stages in simple language. • Show your favourite plant or tool. • Show their materials and tools, let them examine/touch these and ask questions if relevant.	Build understanding through multi-sensory input.
Safety and sensory awareness 5 – 10 min	• Discuss and agree on safety rules. Show how to use tools safely, give out gloves, show shade area, etc • Discuss and agree on rules of action. (When you have finished your work, then...)(We share tools...) (If you do not know how then...)	Builds trust and comfort

Breakdown Timeframe (flexible)	Activities	Purpose
Guided hands-on gardening 30-60 min	• Demonstrate work stages silently or with minimal words, one task at a time. • Students can choose tasks and can be paired for mini tasks (e.g. one makes hole, the other plants), or the teacher(s). • Gentle (physical) guidance if needed.	Learning through observation and imitation. Create emotional security that facilitates learning.
Natural pause & observation 5-15 min	• Drink water, have a snack. • Sit quietly, observe gardening plot: what has changed? • Teachers share memories/stories and discuss organic gardening/food/health.	Prevent fatigue and overload. Processing through environment, not explanation.
Guided hands-on gardening continues 20-60 min	• Continue with work on the same principles, with more independence and less guidance if possible.	Learning through observation and imitation. Encourages independence and confidence.
Reflection & Communication 10 min	• Show and tell – what did you learn? What do you want to know more about? • Self-assessment: how did you do – what went well, what do you want to do better? • Praise effort, not perfection. Encourage expressing mutual appreciation (teachers thank the students and students thank the elderly teacher(s)).	Reinforce learning and self-expression. Encourage independence and confidence.
Positive Closure & Predictable Ending 5 min	• Walk back through the garden slowly, raising environmental understanding. • Say farewell individually. • Agree on follow-up meeting, if possible.	Support environmental awareness and emotional well-being

14. Learning Through Gardening: Lesson plans

The following lesson plans are designed to support learning through gardening for children and young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN). Each lesson uses the garden as a flexible, sensory-rich learning environment where academic skills, life skills, and social interaction develop naturally through hands-on activities.

The lessons cover a range of learning areas, including biology, mathematics, environmental science, art, literacy, social skills, intergenerational learning, and life skills. While each lesson has a specific focus, all are connected by common principles: inclusion, sensory engagement, cooperation, and learning by doing.

Each lesson plan follows a clear and consistent structure to help mentors and teachers prepare with confidence.

Every lesson plan includes:

- a topic and suggested age group or class,
- estimated duration,
- learning objectives,
- practical tasks and activities,
- expected learning outcomes,
- required materials,
- and a suggested lesson structure that can be adapted to different abilities and group sizes.

To support reflection and individual expression, each lesson is accompanied by an optional worksheet provided in the appendix. These worksheets include simple tasks related to the lesson and a short self-assessment activity, allowing students to reflect on how they felt during the session using visual and choice-based options (e.g. *I liked it, It was fine, It was difficult / I needed help*). Worksheets are optional and should be used flexibly, depending on students' needs, energy levels, and communication preferences.

Mentors are encouraged to adapt each lesson to their local context, available materials, weather conditions, and the needs of the group. Lessons may be shortened, extended, repeated, or combined. Success is not measured by completing every task, but by creating a positive, safe, and meaningful learning experience.

These lesson plans are intended as a supportive guide, not a fixed programme. Use them as inspiration, trust your observations, and remember that even small moments in the garden can lead to valuable learning and connection.

Lesson plan No. 1

Topic: From Seed to Plant



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Lesson subject: Biology
Class: Grades 7–10 (SUP groups)
Duration: 45 minutes



45 min.



10-15



Objective:

To introduce the stages of plant growth and to develop observation, motor, and responsibility skills.

Tasks:

1. To recognize the main stages of plant growth (seed → sprout → plant).
2. To practically plant a seed in soil and take proper care of it.
3. To name and identify the main parts of a plant (root, stem, leaf).

Outcomes:

By the end of the lesson, students will:

- Recognize the stages: seed → sprout → plant;
- Plant a seed;
- Name a plant part (root, stem, leaf);
- Reflect on their own activity.

Materials:

Seeds, pots, soil, water, visual cards, worksheet, pencils, gloves.

Suggested Lesson Structure:

- Introduction (5–10 min): discussion about growth stages and plant parts.
- Practice (25 min): planting seeds, labeling pots, completing the worksheet.
- Summary/Reflection (10 min): group discussion of activities, student self-assessment.

Assessment:

- Teacher observations, oral feedback.
- Student self-assessment with smiley faces.
- Note who completed the task independently and who needed help.

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Appendix – Worksheet

Task 1: Sequencing

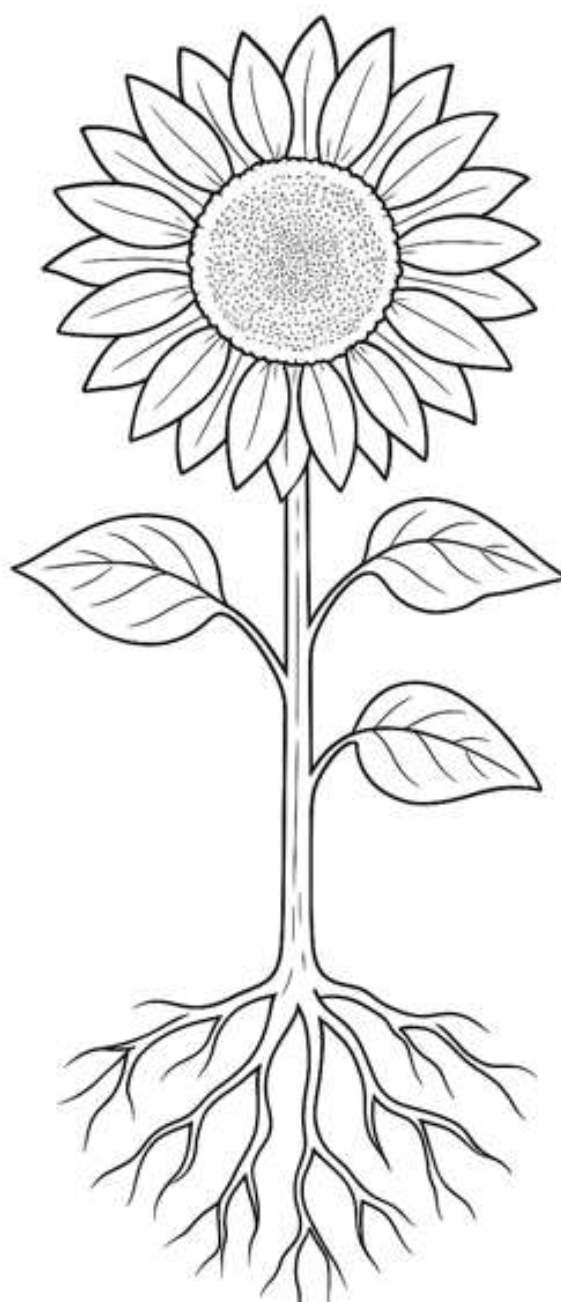
Students write the numbers 1, 2, 3 in the boxes to match the plant growth cycle:

- ☐ Seed
- ☐ Sprout
- ☐ Plant

Task 2: Coloring and Labeling

Color the plant and use arrows to label these plant parts:

LEAF – ROOTS – STEM – FLOWER



Task 3: Self-Assessment

Underline the answer that shows how you felt during the lesson:

- I liked it
- It was fine
- It was difficult / I needed help

Lesson plan No. 2

Topic: Measuring Growth



Nordplus



Lesson subject: Math

Class: Grades 7–10 (SEN groups)

Duration: 45 minutes



30-45 min.



10-15



Objective:

To introduce students to basic measurement concepts through observing and recording plant growth, while strengthening numeracy, comparison, and tracking skills.

Tasks:

1. To understand that plants grow and change over time.
2. To measure plant height using a ruler or string.
3. To record measurement results on a simple chart.
4. To compare plant sizes using basic vocabulary (taller, shorter, same).

Outcomes:

By the end of the lesson, students will:

- Understand that plants grow over time
- Measure plant height with a ruler or string
- Record data on a simple chart
- Compare differences in plant sizes
- Use basic math vocabulary in context (taller, shorter, same)

Materials:

Rulers or measuring tapes (flexible, easy to read), worksheet, potted plants of varying heights, colored pencils or stickers, visual math vocabulary cards (e.g., "more", "less", "tall", "short").

Suggested Lesson Structure:

- Introduction (5–10 min): Compare a tall and short plant, introduce math words (tall, short, more, less, same).
- Practice (25 min): Students measure their plants, record height, compare results, color or add stickers to the chart.
- Reflection (10 min): Group discussion about tallest/shortest plant, line up plants in order, self-assessment with smiley faces.

For more information, please visit our website: <https://growing-together.eduprojects.eu/>

Lesson plan 2 – Math

Optional



Appendix – Worksheet

Task 1: Measurement Recording

Fill in the table or use stickers/icons for support.

Task 2: Draw Your Plant

Space to draw today's plant and add the number of centimeters



Task 3: Compare Sizes

Match or circle: "Which is taller?" "Which plant grew more?"

Task 4: Self-Assessment

Underline the answer that shows how you felt during the lesson:

I liked it

It was fine

It was difficult / I needed help

Lesson plan No. 3

Topic: Composting



Nordplus



Lesson subject: Environmental Science

Class: Grades 7–10 (SEN groups)

Duration: 45 minutes



30-45 min.



10-15



Objective:

To help students understand how composting works: food and garden scraps decompose and return to the soil, helping new plants grow.

Tasks:

1. To recognize that compost is made from food and garden waste.
2. To identify at least three compostable items.
3. To participate in a simple composting activity.
4. To describe the composting cycle using pictures or simple words.

Outcomes:

By the end of the lesson, students will:

- Understand that compost is made from food and garden waste
- Recognize that compost helps plants grow—and plants give us new food
- Identify at least 3 compostable items
- Participate in a simple composting activity
- Describe the composting cycle using pictures or simple phrases

Materials:

Visual chart or cards showing the composting cycle Food → Scraps → Compost → Soil → Plants → Food, real compost at different stages (scraps, decomposing, finished), compostable items (e.g., apple core, carrot peel, lettuce leaf, eggshells), compost bin or pile (or classroom demo setup), gloves, small scoops or trowels, worksheet.

Suggested Lesson Structure:

- Introduction (10 min): Show compost cycle chart, pass around items, introduce words (cycle, compost, scraps, soil, grow).
- Practice (25 min): Build compost pile/bin together, add food scraps and leaves, explore texture and smell, observe decomposers.
- Reflection (10 min): Discuss what was added, complete worksheet (color cycle, match items, draw bin), self-assessment.

For more information, please visit our website: <https://growing-together.eduprojects.eu/>



Appendix – Worksheet

Task 1: Compost Cycle Coloring Page

Arrows showing:

Food → Scraps → Compost → Plant → Food



Task 2: What Can Be Composted?

Sort activity:

- Apple core
- Carrot peel
- Candy wrapper
- Tea bag
- Plastic fork

Task 3: Draw or Sequence Activity

Cut-and-paste or draw the compost cycle

Number the steps (1–4):

1. Collect scraps
2. Compost pile
3. Garden soil
4. New plants

Task 4: Self-Assessment

Underline the answer that shows how you felt during the lesson:

- I liked it
- It was fine
- It was difficult / I needed help

Lesson plan No. 4

Topic: Garden Art



Nordplus



Lesson subject: Art

Class: Grades 7–10 (SEN groups)

Duration: 45 minutes



30-45 min.



10-15



Objective:

To encourage creativity using natural materials, fostering sensory exploration, fine motor skills, and emotional expression.

Tasks:

1. To create artwork using natural materials from the garden.
2. To identify and name at least three natural materials (leaf, flower, stone, stick, etc.).
3. To express an idea or mood using color, shape, or texture.
4. To share or present the artwork to classmates.

Outcomes:

By the end of the lesson, students will:

- Use natural materials to create an individual or group artwork
- Express a mood or idea using color, shape, or texture
- Identify at least 3 different natural materials from the garden (e.g., leaf, stick, flower, stone)
- Participate in sharing or describing their creation

Materials:

Collected garden items (leaves, flowers, stones, seeds, twigs, bark, etc.), paper, cardboard, fabric scraps, or flat stones as a base, glue, string, scissors, markers or paint (as appropriate), magnifying glass for texture observation (optional), aprons or protective clothing, visual examples or inspiration cards (e.g., leaf mandala, nature collage).

Suggested Lesson Structure:

- Introduction (10 min): Show examples of garden art, pass around items, discuss colors/textures.
- Practice (25 min): Students create garden artwork (mandala, collage, stone painting). Encourage free expression.
- Reflection (10 min): Group gallery walk, students present or point to their favorite part, self-assessment with smiley faces or symbols.

For more information, please visit our website: <https://growing-together.eduprojects.eu/>

Lesson plan 4 – Art

Optional



Appendix – Worksheet

Task 1: Garden Art Checklist

Mark the materials that you have used during the lesson.

I used:



Task 2: Color & Texture Hunt (pre-activity or during)

Match or draw something that is:

- ☐ Green
- ☐ Soft
- ☐ Bumpy
- ☐ Round
- ☐ Yellow

Task 3: Self-Assessment

Underline the answer that shows how you felt during the lesson:

I liked it

It was fine

It was difficult / I needed help

Lesson plan No. 5

Topic: Tasting Herbs



Nordplus



Lesson subject: Biology & Life Skills

Class: Grades 7–10 (SEN groups)

Duration: 45 minutes



30-45 min.



10-15



Objective:

To engage students' senses, especially taste and smell, by exploring and tasting herbs grown in the garden. The lesson supports sensory development, vocabulary enrichment, and food-related confidence.

Tasks:

1. To identify at least 3 different herbs using sight, touch, and smell.
2. To taste herbs and describe flavors using simple words or gestures.
3. To express preferences (like/dislike).
4. To understand that herbs come from plants and are used in food.

Outcomes:

By the end of the lesson, students will:

- Identify at least 3 different herbs using sight, touch, and smell
- Taste selected herbs and describe the flavor using simple words or gestures
- Express personal preferences (like/dislike)
- Understand that herbs come from plants and can be used in food

Materials:

Fresh herbs (mint, parsley, basil, chives, oregano, dill, etc.), herb name cards with photos and symbols, tasting chart or worksheet (see Appendix), drinking water and napkins, magnifying glasses, herb leaves on plates (optional), hand sanitizer or hand-washing station, emotions cards (for like/dislike).

Suggested Lesson Structure:

- Introduction (10 min): show herbs, discuss colors and smells, introduce words (herb, leaf, smell, taste).
- Practice (25 min): students smell and taste herbs, record preferences on charts, optional “guess the smell” game.
- Summary/Reflection (10 min): discuss favorite herbs, draw or mark preferences, talk about how herbs make food taste better, self-assessment.

For more information, please visit our website: <https://growing-together.eduprojects.eu/>



Appendix – Worksheet

Task 1: Herb Tasting Chart

Fill in the table.

Herb	Smelled It	Tasted It	Did I Like It?
Mint 			
Basil 			
Parsley 			

Task 2: My Favorite Herb Drawing

Space to draw a leaf or color in a herb shape

Draw here



Task 3: Self-Assessment

Underline the answer that shows how you felt during the lesson:

I liked it

It was fine

It was difficult / I needed help

Lesson plan No. 6

Topic: Gardening Journal



Nordplus



Lesson subject: Literacy
Class: Grades 7–10 (SEN groups)
Duration: 45 minutes



30-45 min.



10-15



Objective:

To develop basic writing, drawing, and communication skills by keeping a simple gardening journal. Students will reflect on what they observe, do, and feel in the garden using words, pictures, or symbols.

Tasks:

1. To record gardening experiences using words, pictures, or symbols.
2. To use sentence starters or word banks for descriptions.
3. To practice sequencing (first, then, next).
4. To build confidence in expressing ideas through writing or visuals.

Outcomes:

By the end of the lesson, students will:

- Record their gardening experience using words, symbols, or drawings
- Use sentence starters or word banks to describe activities and observations
- Develop sequencing (first, then, next) and vocabulary related to gardening
- Build confidence in expressing themselves through writing or visuals

Materials:

Gardening journals or stapled booklets (one per student), pencils, markers, glue sticks, word and picture bank (e.g., water, dig, seed, plant, grow, sun, happy, tired), visual sequencing cards, real garden objects (leaves, photos, small tools) for inspiration, printed sentence starters or communication boards (optional).

Suggested Lesson Structure:

- Introduction (10 min): review recent gardening activities, show photos/objects, introduce idea of a journal.
- Practice (25 min): students write or draw in journals using prompts (Today I planted... / I saw...), use stickers or leaves, match words to pictures.
- Summary/Reflection (10 min): share entries, discuss favorite parts, self-assess with smiley faces.

For more information, please visit our website: <https://growing-together.eduprojects.eu/>



Appendix – Worksheet

Task 1: Today in the garden I...

Mark the right answers.



Task 2: Draw yourself in the garden

Space to draw

Task 3: Self-Assessment

Underline the answer that shows how you felt during the lesson:

I liked it

It was fine

It was difficult / I needed help

Draw here



Lesson plan No. 7

Topic: Garden Calendar - Understanding Time



Nordplus



30-45 min.



10-15



Lesson subject: General Studies

Class: Grades 7–10 (SEN groups)

Duration: 45 minutes

Objective:

To introduce students to the concepts of days, weeks, months, and seasons by using a garden calendar. The lesson connects real-life gardening tasks to the passage of time, helping students understand planning, sequencing, and routine.

Tasks:

1. To recognize time units (today, tomorrow, yesterday, week, month, season).
2. To place garden tasks on a visual calendar.
3. To identify the current season and weather.
4. To connect plant growth with time (seed → sprout → harvest).

Outcomes:

By the end of the lesson, students will:

- Recognize time units - today, tomorrow, yesterday, week, month, season
- Place simple garden tasks on a visual calendar
- Identify the current season and weather
- Begin to understand the timeline of plant growth (e.g., seed → sprout → harvest)

Materials:

Large visual calendar (monthly or weekly layout), velcro/magnetic task cards (e.g., plant seeds, water plants, harvest, rest), season wheel or posters (spring, summer, autumn, winter), weather symbols (sunny, cloudy, rainy, cold, hot), photos of garden activities by month/season, personal mini-journals or printed weekly charts, markers, stickers, colored pencils.

Suggested Lesson Structure:

- Introduction (10 min): calendar routine (day, month, season), discuss garden tasks in each season.
- Practice (25 min): place icons for weekly tasks, update class calendar, introduce plant growth timeline, use personal charts.
- Summary/Reflection (10 min): use sentence starters (Yesterday we... / Today we will...), discuss favorite seasons, complete mini worksheet.

For more information, please visit our website: <https://growing-together.eduprojects.eu/>

Lesson plan 7 – Garden Calendar

Optional



Appendix – Worksheet

Task 1: Mark which tasks are done in each season.

Write the numbers.



Task 2: My Garden Week

o Monday: _____

o Wednesday: _____

o Friday: _____

(Write / use symbols or drawings)

Task 3: Time Talk – Circle One

o Today is: ☐ Sunny ☐ Rainy ☐ Windy ☐ Cloudy ☐ Hot ☐ Cold

o Season: ☐ Spring ☐ Summer ☐ Autumn ☐ Winter

o My plant is: ☐ Just planted ☐ Growing ☐ Ready to pick

Task 4: Self-Assessment

Underline the answer that shows how you felt during the lesson:

I liked it

It was fine

It was difficult / I needed help

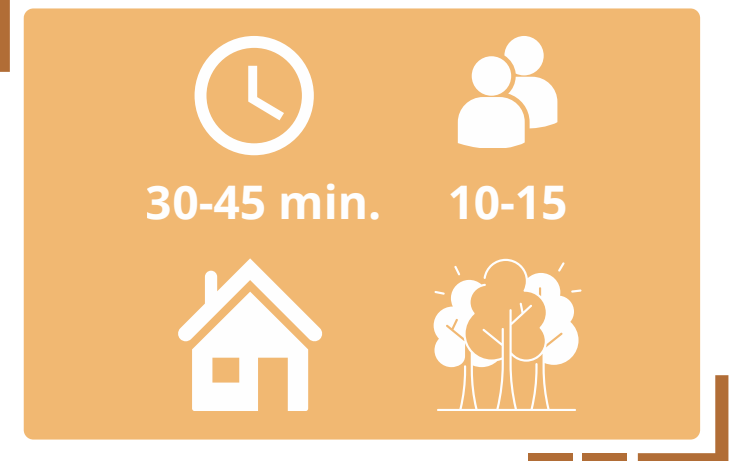
Lesson plan No. 8

Topic: Garden Team Roles

Lesson subject: Social Skills

Class: Grades 7–10 (SEN groups)

Duration: 45 minutes



Objective:

To introduce students to the concept of teamwork and individual roles in shared gardening tasks, building communication, cooperation, and responsibility.

Tasks:

1. To identify at least 3 different roles in a garden team.
2. To perform a simple garden task within a team.
3. To demonstrate cooperation (listening, waiting, helping).
4. To reflect on their own contribution to the group.

Outcomes:

By the end of the lesson, students will:

- Identify at least 3 different roles in a garden team (e.g., Waterer, Planter, Harvester) and take on a simple garden task within a team
- Demonstrate cooperation (e.g., listening, waiting, helping)
- Reflect on how they contributed to the group

Materials:

Role badges or picture cards (e.g., “Waterer,” “Tool Keeper,” “Weeder,” “Plant Monitor”), garden tools, watering cans, baskets, a teamwork chart with job descriptions and visuals, reflection worksheet or communication board, visual timer or task schedule, stickers or symbols for completion tracking.

Suggested Lesson Structure:

- Introduction (10 min): Discussion about teamwork; introduce and explain role cards; students choose or are assigned a role, e.g.:
 - o Waterer – gives plants a drink
 - o Planter – puts seeds or plants in the soil
 - o Weeder – pulls out the weeds
 - o Tool Keeper – carries and puts away tools
 - o Garden Watcher – checks on plant growth
- Practice (25 min): In small teams, students complete their garden role using a task board or checklist; teachers/adults support and encourage cooperation.
- Summary/Reflection (10 min): Circle-time sharing (“What was your job?” “What did you enjoy?”); complete reflection worksheet; celebrate with group cheer.

For more information, please visit our website: <https://growing-together.eduprojects.eu/>

Lesson plan 8 – Social Skills

Optional



Appendix – Worksheet

Task 1: My Job Today:

Mark the correct answer.



What I Did:

(Draw a picture / Use symbols to describe the task)

How I Felt:

- ☐ I liked working in a team
- ☐ It was okay
- ☐ I wanted a different job

Who I Helped:

- ☐ I worked with a friend
- ☐ I helped someone
- ☐ Someone helped me

Task 2: Self-Assessment

Underline the answer that shows how you felt during the lesson:

I liked it

It was fine

It was difficult / I needed help

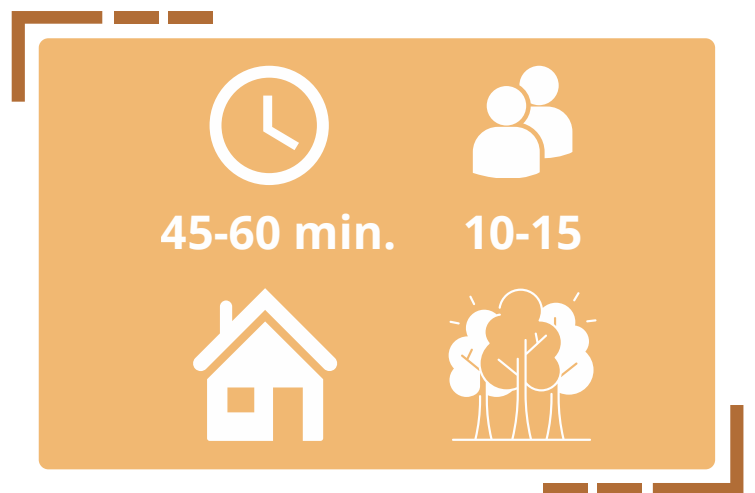
Lesson plan No. 9

Topic: Elder Stories in the Garden

Lesson subject: Intergenerational Learning

Class: Grades 7–10 (SEN groups)

Duration: 45 - 60 minutes



Objective:

To create opportunities for students to listen, connect, and communicate with older adults through storytelling related to gardening, seasons, food traditions, or nature. The lesson encourages empathy, listening, and cultural learning.

Tasks:

1. To listen to at least one personal story shared by an elder.
2. To ask or respond to at least one question using words, gestures, or visuals.
3. To recognize similarities / differences between student and elder experiences.
4. To create a drawing or reflection based on the story.

Outcomes:

By the end of the lesson, students will:

- Listen to at least one personal story shared by an elder
- Ask or respond to at least one question using words, gestures, or visuals
- Recognize similarities and differences between their lives and the elder's stories
- Participate in a shared reflection or creative activity based on the story

Materials:

Visual support cards: "I have a question," "I liked this," "Can you repeat?", drawing supplies or reflection sheets, story prompts for elders ("What did you grow as a child?", "What garden job did you like?", "Did you ever plant something with your family?"), recording device or camera (with consent) for memory-keeping, real objects (old gardening tools, seeds, photos - optional).

Suggested Lesson Structure:

- Introduction (10 min): Welcome and introduce the elder; explain listening and respect.
- Practice (20–30 min): Elder shares a garden story; students respond with questions or cards; teacher supports dialogue.
- Summary/Reflection (15–20 min): Students draw/write a memory from the story; create a "Memory Garden Wall" with student responses.

For more information, please visit our website: <https://growing-together.eduprojects.eu/>

Lesson plan 9 – Intergenerational Learning

Optional



Appendix – Worksheet

Task 1: My Favorite Part of the Story:

☐ The plants ☐ The family ☐ The old tools ☐ The food

Task 2: I Want to Ask or Say:

o“What did it taste like?”

o“Did you get dirty?”

o“That sounds fun!”

Task 3: Draw a Memory from the Story:

Draw here



Task 4: Self-Assessment

Underline the answer that shows how you felt during the lesson:

I liked it

It was fine

It was difficult / I needed help

Lesson plan No. 10

Topic: Harvest Festival with Cooking



Lesson subject: Life Skills

Class: Grades 7–10 (SEN groups)

Duration: Several sessions (final event ~60–90 min.)



Several sessions



10-15



Objective:

To guide students through the planning and celebration of a Harvest Festival, highlighting the joy of growing, harvesting, and cooking with food from the garden. This project supports real-life skills such as teamwork, planning, food preparation, communication, and creative expression, while fostering inclusion.

Tasks:

- 1.To harvest and prepare simple dishes using garden produce.
- 2.To learn basic cooking and hygiene practices.
- 3.To contribute to planning, decorating, or hosting the festival.
- 4.To reflect on their experience and achievements.

Outcomes:

By the end of the lesson, students will:

- Participate in garden harvesting and basic cooking activities
- Understand where food comes from and how to prepare it safely
- Contribute to the planning and hosting of a group celebration
- Reflect on their gardening and cooking experiences
- Engage in teamwork and share their achievements with others

Materials:

Harvested garden produce (herbs, lettuce, berries, carrots, etc.), simple cooking tools: cutting boards, child-safe knives, bowls, spoons, pots (if needed), cooking ingredients and hygiene items: oil, butter, lemon, gloves, aprons, wipes, recipe visuals or step-by-step cards (e.g., "Make herb butter", "Mint tea"), serving tables, tasting cups/plates, napkins, decorations and signs for festival space, invitations or posters, reflection materials (journals, photo books, feedback sheets)

Suggested Lesson Structure (over several sessions):

1. Planning the Festival (Session 1)

- Introduce the festival idea: "We will celebrate by sharing what we grew—and what we cook!"

For more information, please visit our website: <https://growing-together.eduprojects.eu/>

Lesson plan No. 10



Topic: Harvest Festival with Cooking

Brainstorm with students:

- o What dishes can we make from our garden?
- o Who will cook, harvest, decorate, invite guests?
- o What songs, drawings, or photos should we include?

2. Cooking Preparation Sessions (Sessions 2–3)

- Teach simple recipes that use garden ingredients:
 - o Herb Butter: mix chopped herbs with soft butter
 - o Fruit/Vegetable Skewers: thread fresh pieces onto sticks
 - o Herbal Tea: brew mint or lemon balm leaves
 - o Salad Wraps or Open-faced sandwiches with garden toppings
- Use step-by-step cards, visuals, and cooking roles (mixer, washer, cutter)
- Focus on hygiene, safety, and cooperation
- Involve students in tasting and choosing what to serve at the festival

3. Preparing the Event (Sessions 3–4)

- Harvest produce needed for the recipes
- Create table signs, decorations, and role badges (e.g., "Junior Chef", "Greeter")
- Practice welcoming guests or presenting what they made
- Pack or plate food with support and supervision

4. Hosting the Festival (Final Event)

- Welcome guests (teachers, families, peers, elderly volunteers)
- Serve dishes made by students and display their garden work
- Optional: storytelling, a group song, a short skit, or student reflections
- Celebrate contributions: "Our Garden Chefs!" "Our Plant Artists!"
- Take photos and offer thank-you tokens or certificates

5. Reflection and Closure (Post-Festival Session)

- Discuss: "What did we like best: planting, cooking, tasting, or decorating?"
- Create thank-you notes for helpers or guests
- Fill out a personal reflection page or draw their favorite memory

Assessment and Reflection

- Observe participation and engagement across all stages
- Evaluate cooking contribution through role-taking and task performance
- Use self-assessment visuals or reflection sheets
- Provide positive reinforcement for collaboration and trying new skills

Lesson plan 10 – Life Skills

Optional



Appendix – Worksheet

Task 1: My Festival Role:

Mark the correct answer.



What I Cooked or Helped Make:

My Favorite Taste Was:

Task 2: Self-Assessment

Underline the answer that shows how you felt during the lesson:

I liked it

It was fine

It was difficult / I needed help



HAPPY



NEUTRAL



SAD



QUESTION



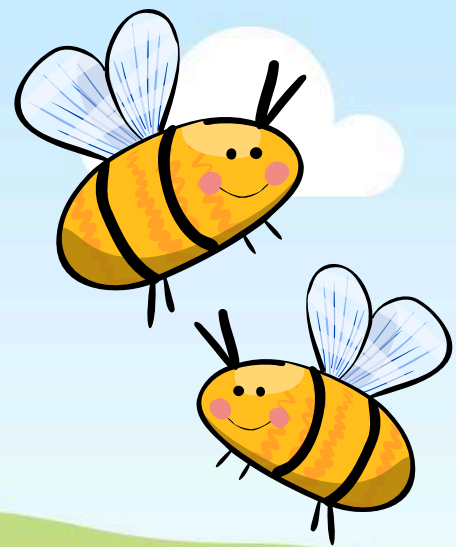
SUN



WIND



CLOTHES



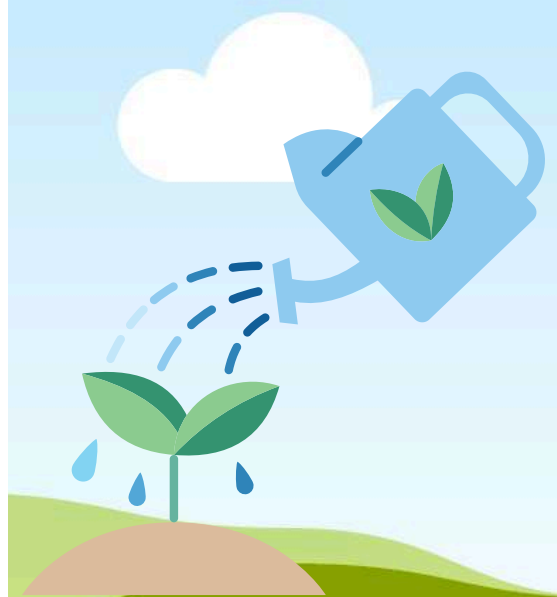
BUGS



TIME



TOOLS



WATER



ATTENTION



SILENCE



HELP



TEAMWORK



DONE



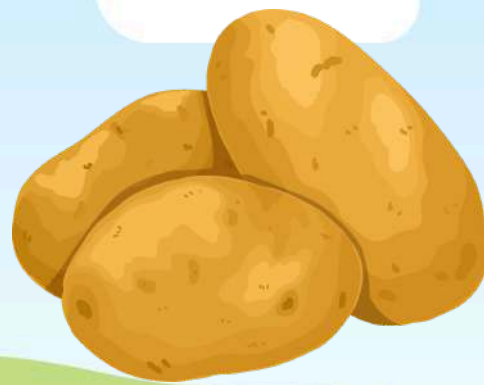
CARROT



CUCUMBER



TOMATO



POTATO



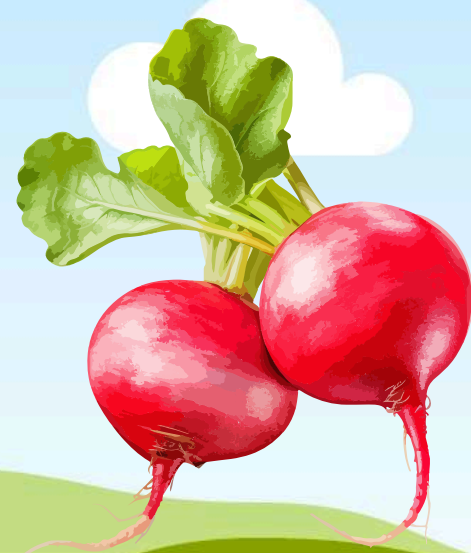
ONION



PUMPKIN



PEA



RADISH



APPLE



STRAWBERRY



BLUBERRY



PLUM



MINT



BASIL



PARSLEY



LETTUCE

Conclusion

Gardening is more than planting seeds – it is a way to grow confidence, curiosity, and connection. Through hands-on activities, sensory experiences, and intergenerational collaboration, students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) can develop practical skills, emotional awareness, and a sense of belonging. At the same time, mentors and older participants share their knowledge, patience, and life experience, creating a mutually enriching learning environment.

This handbook has provided guidance on understanding learners, planning inclusive sessions, fostering safety and well-being, and reflecting on each experience. It has also offered inspiration through examples from Finland, Lithuania, and Estonia, showing how the “Growing Together” approach can be adapted to different contexts.

The “Growing Together” model and lesson plans are tools to help mentors structure sessions, but flexibility, empathy, and creativity remain at the heart of successful gardening experiences. Every garden, group, and learner is unique, and the most meaningful outcomes come from listening, observing, and responding to the needs and interests of the participants.

Thank you for being part of this journey – for bringing patience, care, and enthusiasm to every session. By nurturing plants, you are also nurturing relationships, skills, and joy that will grow far beyond the garden.

Contributor Contacts and Project Acknowledgments

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