

Being outside in the garden is a treat for students and can be a very calming and physically engaging activity. This new environment can be extra stimulating, especially as students get used to new experiences in the garden. As you expand your instruction beyond the walls of your classroom to your outdoor Learning Garden, consider the following suggestions to set the stage for a successful outdoor engagement. Please note, suggestions are organized chronologically and may not cover all your needs as a teacher.

## Planning your Learning Garden lesson, activity, or task:

- **Check** Big Green's [website](#) for ideas about leading garden skills, lessons, or activities.
- **Start Small:** There is no need to start by teaching a whole lesson in the garden. Take your students out for a short activity (e.g. a creative writing assignment) to help get students comfortable with the outdoor classroom. From here you can work your way up to garden maintenance activities and then to a full garden lesson.

## The week before:

- **Schedule** your visit to the garden to avoid high-traffic times (e.g., recess, outdoor physical education class, school dismissal, and sports or band practice).
- Check the **weather** and **communicate** with students and families about appropriate garden attire: hats and jackets on cold days, sunscreen on sunny days, and wear **shoes that can get dirty**, or bring an extra pair.
- Recruit **volunteers** or partner with another class to work with students.
- **Decide** whether to work as a whole class, in stations, or in small groups. If you are gardening with your students, prepare a non-garden task or activity if there are a limited number of garden-related tasks. See Big Green's [Back-Pocket Activities](#) for ideas!
- If bees or other **insects** are potential visitors, create a plan for this! Encourage students to "chill and be still" when they discover an insect, spider or worm. For those students who are afraid of bugs, talk individually with them and create a plan. **Model** the reaction that you want your students to have.
- If any student has an **allergy** and requires an EpiPen, make sure to have access to one.

## The day before:

- Take a quick **walk through** the garden to ensure that the state of the garden can fulfill your lesson or activity objectives. See our FAQ for more information.
- If you need any other supplies or written instructions, gather and **set up** those materials.

## The morning of:

- Remove any **hazards** or **litter** from the garden and take note of plant or insect life that you can address in your lesson.
- If watering, set up the area so that **water** use can be closely monitored. You may want to fill buckets ahead of time or keep the water turned off until needed.
- **Preview** the lesson or activity objectives for your garden visit. Consider showing a [video](#) from our website.
- If using stations, **divide** the class and give them tasks prior to heading to the garden.

## Going to the Learning Garden:

- Give written **instructions** or a garden **map** for clear guidance.
- Allow yourself ample time to **transition** from the classroom to the school garden.
- Allow time for a bathroom and **handwashing** stop on the way to the garden or encourage students to use the bathroom before they arrive in class. Keep in mind, all students should wash their hands prior to harvesting.
- If using **volunteers**, ensure they have a task and/or group of students assigned to them.
- Before leaving the classroom, remind students about the **behavior expectations** in the garden. Establish rules for moving in the garden, see Big Green's [Rule-Making Activity](#).
- Give students something to **think** about on the way to the garden: How does the garden relate to today's lesson? What do you think the garden will look like today?

## In the Learning Garden:

- **Reiterate instructions** before students are within reach of the garden. This could be while students are outside of the garden area or arranged strategically within the garden.
- Take a quick **tour** of the garden, address notable features with class, or do an **introduction activity** to help the students settle into the space. Refer to Big Green's list of [Back-Pocket Activities](#).
- Use a **quiet sign** to refocus attention (this could be a word, sound, or hand signal). When student's hands are in the soil, have them brush the soil off and back away before moving on to the next activity.
- Designate a **seat** for those who need a moment to refocus.
- Find **teachable moments**, for example: discuss the need for insects and pollinators in plant life cycles and explore the difference between beneficial insects and pests.

## Leaving the Learning Garden:

- **Clean up** the area for the next visitors. Remove plant debris and sweep pavers.
- **Wash hands** on the way back to the classroom or encourage students to wash their hands as they transition to another class.
- **Reflect** on your time in the garden with your students. What do they think went well? How do they think the experience could be improved next time?

