

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How can my students and I avoid glare from the sun on bright days?

When addressing your class as a group, make sure you are facing the sun and angle slightly so that the sun is not in your eyes or wear a hat with a brim. Have your students then face you, and there should be minimal glare.

2. How can I avoid distractions in the garden?

- If your garden is near the play area, schedule garden time when recess is not in session.
- Avoid going out right before lunch or the end of the day to avoid distractions of hunger or dismissal.
- Discuss possible distractions like spiders or bees in the classroom before going out to the garden. This will make insect visitors less scary and prime students for a teachable moment.

3. Do my students need gloves or shovels to work in the garden?

The soil in new Learning Gardens is very light and loose. You do not need gloves or shovels to plant or harvest in the garden. As the garden ages and the soil settles it will become more compact. You can use the small shovels and trowels included in your garden kit to remove weeds or out-of-season crops and loosen the soil before planting. Loosening the soil by hand is a fun activity for students who don't mind getting dirty.

4. Some of my students can't see when I do a demonstration in one of the garden beds. What can I do to improve visibility around the garden beds?

Here are a few different ways to organize your class:

- Tell your students that you will do two demonstrations, so everyone who cannot see the first time can watch the second time. Consider inviting a student to repeat your demonstration.
- In the classroom, arrange students in order of height from shortest to tallest. Have students line up in two rows around the long arc of the garden bed, with the taller students in back.
- Divide students into small groups and ask a volunteer or student leader to model the activity to each group.
- Ask students to observe the student before them in line.

5. What can I do when the number of students outnumbers the seats in the garden?

Garden work is active and hands-on, so try to keep students up and moving. If you want your students to sit down for a specific lesson or activity, here are a few suggestions:

- Give students clipboards so they can stand or sit anywhere.
- Have students spread out in the garden and work in small groups. Some students can stand, some can sit on benches or boulders, and some can sit on the ground. Consider bringing in old towels or sit pads for those on the ground.
- Brainstorm with your students and/or the garden team about adding more seating to the garden: additional benches, temporary seating (folding chairs), alternatives such as tree stumps, decorated buckets, milk crates etc.

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6. How can I keep my students from jumping on the benches and boulders?

- Invite your students to work together on setting behavior expectations for the Learning Garden. Check out Big Green's [Rule-Making Activity](#) for guidance on setting behavior expectations as a classroom.
- Before going out to the garden, emphasize that it is an extension of the classroom, and the same guidelines apply.
- Ask your students to compare the surface of the garden versus the grass or playground surface. Would they want to fall on the hard garden surface like they do on the other surfaces?
- Designate an area near the garden for students to reflect and refocus or do a secondary activity to help release energy until they can follow the stated behavior expectations for the garden.

7. How do I monitor multiple groups at a time?

- Prepare for both garden and non-garden related tasks so one or more groups can do independent reading, writing, or drawing while the other works in the garden. Switch groups after a desired amount of time.
- Have older students help lead stations.
- [Recruit parent or community volunteers.](#)

8. My class has students with varying abilities; how can I use the garden with a range of learners?

- Pair students of differing abilities with each other, other classes, or other grades.
- Start with small maintenance tasks and build confidence in students' abilities.
- Encourage students to experiment with different methods or tools.
- Offer accommodations to students with sensory sensitivity (gloves, earmuffs, etc.).

9. I'm prepared to teach a lesson using the garden, but something happened and the garden won't be able to fulfill my lesson objectives; what can I do?

- Check out Big Green's [Back-Pocket Activities](#) for quick ideas that need minimal prep.
- If the plants have been eaten by an animal, died, or been harvested, have students examine the garden for evidence of what happened. Work as a class or in small groups to identify the cause or culprit. Develop a hypothesis to research more in the classroom.
- Update the Garden Team and other teachers about the condition of the garden and take steps to avoid future complications (i.e. animal protection, improved communication, soil amendments, etc.).

10. How can I engage students in basic garden maintenance like weeding?

Garden work such as weeding and watering can be repetitive and may seem less rewarding than planting or harvesting. However, regular maintenance is crucial to the success of your garden. Here are some suggestions for how to make basic garden tasks exciting for students:

- Invite two or more classes to take turns removing weeds.
- Have students weigh and track how many and what kind of weeds are removed and compare or compete with other classes.
- Offer prizes or create a school record book for garden-related tasks.