

How to get started Growing Up G.R.E.E.N.

All ages are capable of participating in this program. If your school does not yet have a dedicated garden program it's a wonderful opportunity to turn the classroom a little greener, both figuratively and actually! This activity can easily be spread out over a week or more if you would like or it can be several jam packed days!

It is also a wonderful activity to have older students help with especially when it gets down to the identifying of when to plant which seeds.

1. You will need the following supplies in order to get started:
 - *Seasonally appropriate seeds and shoe boxes to sort them in
 - cardboard or larger index cards to divide sorted seeds in boxes
 - containers to start your seedlings in (old yogurt containers, old plastic seedling six packs from your local nursery, small pots or paper cups)
 - a watering can and/or squirt bottle with a mist type feature
 - foil or trays to put under the seedlings pots
 - newspaper
 - soil (sterile soil is best so you do not get fungus or weeds sprouting)
 - popsicle sticks or reusable plant markers
 - pencils
 - scotch tape

A good way to gather the above supplies is to ask for donations from your students parents and local nurseries. **There are sample letters at the end of this section for you and your students to get an idea from.* Most nurseries are more than glad to help by donating seeds from the end of the season.

2. Have students sort through the seed packets. Ultimately you are sorting to see what is *edible and what is ornamental* and what can be *successfully planted in your area and season.*

The younger students love sorting out the seeds by the pictures on the front of the packets. A **first sort** could be by matching all the *pictures that are the same* and a **second sort** by separating the plants that are *edible from those that are ornamental.*

As you sort you will come across packets with torn edges and seeds spilling out use the tape to close up the holes. If seeds have already spilled set aside to try and identify later.

This is really a fun part! Lots of discussion comes from judging from the picture on the package is it an edible plant or an ornamental. This is also a great chance to look up both these words in a dictionary to clarify. If you are unsure which it is the back of the seed packet will clear that up.

Put seeds in the shoe-boxes divided by pieces of cardboard that the students have cut slightly taller than the seed packets. Have them write on the upper edge of the cardboard dividers what seeds are sorted there (Edible or Ornamental)

3. Not all seeds will grow in the same season. For instance you will not have luck growing tomatoes in the winter or broccoli in the summer. Now that the seeds are sorted by Edible/Ornamental it's time to sort by planting time.

It's fun to have students illustrate either on the black board or on a more permanent piece of poster board (USE PENCIL) a picture of the back-side of a seed packet. This can be done as a group or more individual activity. If as a group have the board up in front of the class with different students taking turns illustrating and the class helping to identify the important information on the back of the packet.

Having a oversized illustration of several different seed packet backs to refer to (make the information the students really need to know in bold) is very handy when planting.

Discussion points become:

- **When to start a seed?** The information will be on the back of the package worded something like "plant seedlings outside after danger of last frost or when temperatures remain above 45 degrees."
- **When is the last frost for your area?** The students will have to look it up.
- **Can all seeds be started indoors in pots?** If a seed does not like to be transplanted it will usually say so on the packet. Edibles that grow under the ground (carrots and radishes,)are good examples of things that do not like to be transplanted.
- **How deep do I plant my seeds?** This information will also be shown on the packet. The rule of thumb is usually plant your seed twice as deep as it is big.
- **How will I know when the seed is ready to donate?** This information may be included on the seed pack in the form of when it is ready to go into the ground.

4. Once you have identified and sorted what seeds are viable for your area and season get your containers ready to plant. Being outside is ideal. The less stress about keeping clean for both the teachers and students the better.
- Have the central area for the students to walk over to and fill their planting containers accessible from all sides. A good size plastic tub is ideal to scoop your soil from but leaving it in the bag it came in is fine too. Your students should work with either one six pack or 3 small pots at a time to keep seeds from being mixed up. Their containers should be filled to the tops but not packed down.
 - I have no more than eight students plant at a table at a time. In the middle of the table I have up to three saucers each with one type of seed in it. Next to it I have the corresponding seed packet so they can choose what to plant and know how to label their seeds. I have popsicle sticks or plant markers and only pencils ready to label the pots the seeds are in. If the students are planting in six packs they need to stick to one type of plant per six-pack. No variety packs! The seedlings emerge at different rates and become injured when removed from the six-packs.

Ideally students will read the packets to see how deep to plant their seeds and how to correctly spell their plants name. With little ones who are unable to read or write yet I have plant markers on the table next to the corresponding seed packets.

I plant two seeds per pot for a better chance that they will grow. Once the seed is planted in the pot the student needs to write the name of the seed from the information on the packet and the date of the planting. This is done in pencil so the plant marker can be used again and so correcting spelling is not an issue. Plant markers are put into the six pack or pot along the side vs. right in the middle of the soil so the seeds are not shoved to the bottom.

The student then gently squirts or sprinkles the seed in its pot with water getting it fairly wet.

- After each six pack or single container is planted the pots are set on a waterproof tray or foil that has been shaped into a tray with sides about two inches high and lined with newspaper to retain water longer. The trays are set on the classroom windowsill or in a greenhouse if you are lucky enough to have one.

- They will need to be watched closely so they neither dry out or get soggy. Never pour water on them, squirt them until they are wet or gently water with a sprinkler spout. Keep a watering schedule/log
*** A sample log is at the end of this section.** posted near the seedlings or on a clipboard to keep the seedlings properly watered.

5. Now you are ready to both wait and get busy! As you wait for the seeds to emerge and then grow into seedlings to be donated you will need your class to brainstorm who might be interested in your seedlings. The Community Garden Representative for your city should have community and school gardens that will gladly take your seedlings. Neighbors near the school and homes for the elderly may also be interested. Brainstorm!

*** A sample letter/e-mail is at the end of this section to give you an idea of what you might say.**

When you have people who are interested in receiving your seedlings be sure and label the six-pack or individual container so that you do not give the promised seedlings away to someone else.

Be sure to keep track of who will be receiving the seedlings so you can confirm how to deliver them or when they can pick the seedlings up. *** A sample form is at the end of this section to keep track of the people receiving donations and how to contact them.**

You will need to roughly know when the seedlings will be ready. This information can be determined by reading the back of the seed packets. Look for the date the seeds should emerge and add 2-3 weeks after that. If it is cold make it a week or so longer. It's really fun to make educated guesses on when things should and actually do come up.

6. When you donate the seedlings it is very important to let people know that you are part of Growing Up G.R.E.E.N. The idea is to pass on the idea of simply sharing extra seeds in the form of seedlings to others each time you plant for yourself. You can do this through a tiny little card or a larger postcard. ***See the sample card at the bottom of this section.**

7. Actually following through on the donation of seedlings can be done several ways:

- If the seedlings are going to your city's Community Garden Coordinator he or she will usually either give you an address to

deliver the seedlings to or accept them at their office for distribution themselves. An adult from your school can arrange to deliver the seedlings either alone or accompanied by several students and treated as a field trip. Taking pictures of the gardens that the seedlings are going to make great bulletin boards and most importantly make it all real for the students.

- If the seedlings are going to neighbors near the school delivery can be treated as a field trip with the plants being distributed by the students. Be sure to contact people to confirm the delivery times and arrangements before attempting to deliver the seedlings.
- People can always come by the school at an appointed time to pick up their plants. Lots of people enjoy meeting the children who grew the seedlings.

Be sure the students are somewhat comfortable with sharing the process of choosing, planting and caring for the seedlings so they can answer basic questions about Growing Up G.R.E.E.N.

- 8. Save all your extra supplies** in a dry spot. Make collecting extra containers, seeds, soil and plant markers a habit so that you will be ready to do it all again. Encourage your students to plant their extra seeds at home when starting their gardens and to participate in Growing Up G.R.E.E.N. by passing them to their friends and neighbors too.
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Samples In Progress

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