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Activity 2: Personalizing the Garden

When kids develop a sense of ownership in your youth garden both the program and the children thrive. Children engaged in planning and caring for the garden tend to take on responsibility and put more effort into garden maintenance and learning activities. You can also nurture the child-garden relationship by inviting them to add a personal touch to the space.

A Few Ideas...

Homemade Plant Labels

Plant labels are important in an educational setting, and when students make the label by hand and add their names it can also build ownership. Kids are proud to show off their work to family and friends, and become diligent caretakers, too.

Make labels from Popsicle sticks, plastic silverware, even from louvers from old Venetian blinds! This is also an opportunity for students to devise ways to reuse other resources, perhaps by cutting labels from plastic containers or other castoffs.

Stepping Stones

Stepping stones are a practical way to mark a clear pathway among garden beds, as well as preventing soil compaction and muddy feet. Plus, student-created stepping stones add a personal touch to the garden! Depending on space and supplies, students can decorate stepping stones alone or as part of a group. (Many school gardens raise money by inviting people to pay to have a stone or brick dedicated in their name — talk about building ownership!)



Use concrete mix and assorted weatherproof craft items to fashion your stones. For molds, try random household items like old cake pans, or you can buy [decorative molds](#). The Gardening with Kids Store also offers [stepping stone kits](#).

Garden Art

Encourage students to design and paint murals on fences, walls, and raised beds, where color will brighten the garden during the quiet winter months and give it a unique personality. Sculptures made from natural or recovered materials also lend a sense of permanence to the space. Another option is to choose a curriculum topic to provide a theme for students' art, such as pollinators/wildlife, peace, nutrition, multicultural

connections, or the like.

Another option is to decorate rocks to incorporate into the design, to use as bed borders, or to add to an all-class mosaic.

Abodes for Beneficials

To lure and keep beneficial critters in the garden, have kids research the housing and feeding requirements of various animals (e.g., birds, ladybugs, mason bees, toads), and then plan, construct, and decorate homes and dining rooms for them!

Scarecrows



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COMMENTS?

Scarecrows often become garden mascots, and making them is a fun team-building exercise. Make frames from old broom handles, bamboo stakes, or lumber scraps. Ask a second-hand store to donate duds or have kids bring old clothes from home to dress up their garden guardians. Ask a local farm supply or feed store to donate straw to give your scarecrow some “muscle.”

Build or Buy a Garden Feature

Start a tradition for garden participants to build or buy a new garden feature each year, such as a bench, trellis, arbor, water garden, tool shed, and so on. Make sure everyone is involved in the planning and decision process. Check out our Classroom Projects on [Exporing Plant Growth with Garden Structures](#) for some elements the kids can build on their own. If you decide to buy a feature, involve youth in each stage of the fundraising process.



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