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## Curriculum Connections

### Five Container Projects

Looking for ideas to get your students' feet wet before they fashion their own bountiful containers? Here are a few ideas to whet their appetites:

#### Edible Flower Planter

Something about the idea of eating flowers delights many youngsters. Have students search for a hanging basket or other container about 16 inches in diameter. Next, obtain nasturtium seeds (trailing or compact varieties), a calendula plant, a chive plant, and 3 violas or pansies. Put the plants into the soil mix (or the sphagnum moss in a hanging basket) with the taller chives and calendula in back. Sow compact nasturtiums in the middle of the container or trailing types on the sides and front. Students can eat their harvest of petals on salads made with their own greens, use them as decorations for cakes or cupcakes, or sell them to raise money for their garden.



#### A Stack of Potatoes

If you're studying asexual reproduction in plants, consider the humble potato. Find a well-drained container that's at least 30 inches deep; a barrel, trash can, or stack of tires will do. Put in about a foot of moist soil, compost, or soil mix and lay potato seed pieces, cut sides down, on top. As the potatoes sprout and grow, students should mulch the shoots with more soil mix, sawdust, or straw. Have your keen observers try to figure out where the potatoes will form. (They form above the original "seed piece.") It's important to keep the tubers covered, because if they are exposed to the sun, they may turn green, which indicates the presence of toxic solanine. When the foliage turns brown, dig in or turn the barrel on its side and pour



out the contents.

An alternate method is to fill one tire with growing media, plant the potato pieces and cover them with a few inches of soil or straw. As soon as the green sprouts are six inches above the tire rim, add another tire and fill it half full of soil mix or straw. Continue adding tires and covering potatoes in this manner through the growing season.

#### Salsa to Go

A 3-foot-wide container or several smaller ones can bring a salsa garden to life. As students research the crops and their uses in Mexican culture, they can also learn about traditional designs and paint their containers accordingly. You can start cilantro from seed in early spring and reseed it throughout the season as the plants get rangy. Also include a medium-size tomato plant, a hot pepper (jalapeño or chile), chives or onion sets, and garlic chives.

#### Aromatic Herb Pillow

For a no-muss method of growing an herb garden, you can use a medium size bag of potting soil. Start with small pots of five herb plants that you've grown, dug, purchased, or had donated. Here are some good candidates: basil, chive, mint, parsley, sage, dill, French tarragon. Lay the bag on its side and use a marker to make an x for each herb plant, offset in two rows. Use scissors to cut a hole on each x. Wet the soil under each hole, move some soil aside — or remove a bit, if necessary — and place each plant in one of the holes. Leave the bag in a sunny location. To keep things neat, don't put in drainage holes. Instead, drip water into each hole only when the plants are close to wilting. After a month, add some fertilizer. Students can use their aromatic harvest for cooking, teas, and herb vinegars.

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**New for Teachers!**

### Half-Barrel Water Garden

A watertight half whiskey or wine barrel makes a great home for floating and submerged aquatic plants. Since these tubs are not *all* watertight, many gardeners line them with heavy black plastic or a flexible PVC liner (available at home stores or garden suppliers). Fill your barrel with water and let it sit for a couple of days to let chlorine evaporate. Visit a nursery that has water garden supplies to find out what types of plants they carry. These make good companions: a Japanese iris, cardinal flower, clump of parrot's feather, one shellflower, and three water hyacinths. Put the cardinal flower, iris, and parrot's feather in soil mix in plastic or terra-cotta pots at least 6 inches in diameter and cover the soil surface with gravel or pebbles. Submerge the containers in the water-filled barrel. Float the water hyacinths and other surface plants on the water. Don't fret if the water turns green at first from algae that are nourished by dissolved nutrients. It should eventually clear. If you want to add gold fish, you can add oxygen by putting in a small submersible pump. For more tips, click to this article: [Making a Water Garden in a Tub](#).

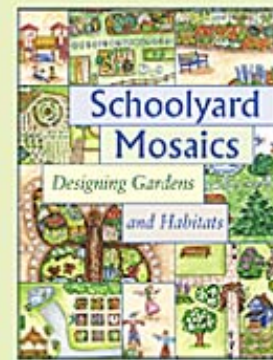


### Cultivating Inquirers

Your container-growing ventures can inspire a variety of student investigations and problem-solving challenges. Start by discussing how life might differ for a plant grown in a container and one grown in the garden. Ask, *In each context, how are a plant's basic needs met? What implications might this have for how we nurture confined plants? How can we address some of the challenges of growing in containers? What other questions do we have? How can we test some of our ideas?* Consider having groups of students develop proposals for investigations, share them with you and peers, and get feedback on their plans before proceeding. Here are some sample investigations:

- Experiment with different types of soil mixes for containers. Students might ask, for instance, *Does lettuce grow larger or faster and/or taste better when raised in a soilless mix, potting mix with worm castings, or garden soil?*
- Explore whether container-grown foods differ in taste from those grown in the garden.
- Design a system to ensure that container plants receive the water they need when school is out of session.
- Figure out how to plant a barrel of pizza and have all ingredients ready to harvest at the same time, or how to grow box of flowers that bloom simultaneously.
- Estimate the volume of soil mix needed for a specific container based on its dimensions.
- Figure out if moving plants in containers to "follow" sunshine increases the growth rate or health of plants.
- Compare how different types of container materials and setups affect the growing environment: soil temperature, moisture, drainage, and so on.
- Build a container garden that is accessible to students in wheelchairs.
- Design and create a container garden that allures and provides nourishment to butterflies and their larvae.

### Creative Container Contest!



We've just published this new book filled with actual school garden plans, stories of how students participated in the design process, how-to information, and resources. You'll find details in our [Gardening with Kids Store](#).

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Consider challenging small groups of students or different classes within the school to design unique container gardens from recycled materials. You may want to develop a list of criteria to guide the process. For instance, *Each garden must . . . use recycled containers, have a specific theme, have a system for supplying water over a long weekend, be artistically creative,* and so on. If you hold a Clever Container Garden Festival, teams of students, teachers, and/or community members can serve as judges, or each student can judge all of the entries. You and your students can work together to develop a rubric for



"scoring" each category. In addition to recognizing entries that meet or exceed your criteria, the judges might create special awards so all container garden creators are recognized. For instance, judges might create an award for *the most unique container, the widest range of colors, the best smelling arrangement,* and so on. Don't forget to invite the local press or TV station to your event to drum up interest and support for your school garden project. The cleverly constructed gardens could stay on display in the schoolyard, or be auctioned off to community members to raise money for garden-related materials or projects.



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