

The Wisdom of the Three Rules

- **“Walk in the Garden”:**

- Kids will need A LOT of reminding – “Walk in the garden!” not “Don’t run!”
- Kids get excited and love to run – these are positive traits! Sometimes you can let kids run in an open space to “get the wiggles out”.

- **“Wait to Be Invited”:**

- To use a tool, to pick something, to taste something...
- “Don’t worry, you will be invited to do many great things today”
- This language helps kids monitor and adjust their own behavior – “Have you been invited to do that?” instead of “Don’t do that!”
- Exceptions are ok – examples: tasting chives or nasturtiums, getting gloves, picking a few herb leaves to smell, picking and eating a ripe berry.

- **“Listen with Respect”:**

- To the adults, to each other, to the plants and creatures in the garden.

****Review the Three Rules every time, first thing****

Positive language – Notice that the Three Rules use positive language, not negative. We try to keep all talk in the garden as positive as possible. Say what you want kids *to* do.

Circle up – Start and end every session with a circle. Go over the Three Rules. Be brief, skip the long lecture. Go around and say names. Starter questions are great to connect kids to each other and loosen people up: “What is your name, and if you could have any super power, what would it be?” Favorite vegetable, fruit, animal, color, activity, etc.

*Leave time at the end for debriefing, even if it’s just one question: “What was your favorite thing - or one new thing you learned - in the garden today?”

An alternative to circling up at the end is to use the “pair and share” method: ask the same question(s) but instead of having everyone share in a circle, invite students to pair off with a classmate as they walk back to class – sharing their responses with one another.



Some tips for working with children in the garden

Relevance, connections, reflection - Children learn more if they understand the value or connections to their life and then reflect on what they have learned. Find out what they know and build on that, “What I know, what I want to know, what I have learned today.” Save time at the end of garden activities for this circle up time.

Non-verbals - Instead of interrupting yourself to ask for attention or to remind children not to have side conversations, sometimes giving “the look” or moving over and standing by disruptive children as you continue talking, is enough.

Children talking out of turn - “I call on students who raise their hands.” If a child dominates or has too long a response, look in the eye and smile, maybe touch lower arm, thank them and ask if anyone else has an idea.

Wait time - After asking a question, wait about 20 seconds (at first this will seem like forever), to call on someone to answer. This gives the children thinking time so more children will respond and you won’t always be calling on the same children. Patience!

Teaching modalities - Some children (and adults) learn by hearing, some by seeing, and others by doing. For effective teaching, **say it, show it, and let children do it.**

Affirmation - It is helpful to give specific affirmations. Instead of saying, “great job,” it is more meaningful to say, “you did a great job being careful and safe using the tools,” or “I noticed that you worked cooperatively with your partner.”

Choices - Children respond more and learn more, when involved in their learning, and when they feel they have some autonomy. Give choices within limits, such as having two tasks and allowing children to choose, or choose which style of tool they prefer. Don’t give open-ended choices (“What do you want to do in the garden today?”), though, unless you are ready to follow through.

Group size/time - 3 to 5 children per adult, depending on age of children and task. To keep interest high, do rotations or stations in the garden.

Fun - Have fun and make it fun for the children as you spread the joy of gardening, eating fresh foods, and being outside!

11 Tips for Outdoor Pedagogy with Kids

1. **Set clear, realistic expectations right at the beginning:** before the first visit to the garden, be sure to review and agree on age-appropriate behavioral guidelines to ensure safety and participation. Have these written/illustrated guidelines visible at all times. Here is an example set of K-5 expectations:
 - The garden is different from the playground - it is an outdoor classroom for learning and having fun!
 - Be kind to every living thing.
 - Please walk on paths.
 - Pick and taste with permission.
 - Use your time well and do respectful listening.
 - Be safe with tools.
 - Clean up after yourself.
2. **Demonstrate the activity as a group before dispersing:** Be very clear what the goals of garden time are, demonstrate and check for understanding on any gardening techniques (such as tool safety, seed depth, proper harvesting, etc.) *before* going into the garden.
3. **Provide a variety of activities:** Not all kids are comfortable getting dirty and everyone learns differently. Make sure to have a few choices for engaging *all* kids in the garden (examples: digging/soil exploration, weeding, harvesting, watering, botanical & wildlife sketches, photography, planting seeds, scavenger hunts, leaf rubs, flower bouquets).
4. **Engage the senses:** One of the unique and exciting aspects of outdoor education is the opportunity to fully engage with Nature- tasting ripe raspberries, listening to a scrub jay, watching a hummingbird pollinate, holding a slimy worm, smelling a mint leaf, and feeling a cool breeze on our skin. Be aware of these opportunities and call students attention to them.
5. **Be flexible (and well-prepared) with lesson plan:** There might not be any butterflies the day you bring your students to the garden, or it may start raining, or worms might just be more interesting than kale. Prepare a thorough lesson but also stay tuned to the interests of your students- you might find a divergent experience is more meaningful than what you'd planned.
6. **Ask lots of open-ended questions:** *Why do you think this tomato plant is taller than that one? What does lemon balm smell like to you? Can you find a leaf that is bigger than your hand? What do you think we'll find in the soil? Are there any vegetables growing here that you eat at home?*
7. **Be consistent with what to do when finished:** Often rowdy behavior happens when kids are 'done' with an activity and unsure what to do next. Always have back-up activities and a consistent routine (where to put tools, clipboards, and pencils, how to wash produce, where to line up, etc).
8. **Be consistent with ways of getting student attention:** Find a consistent, successful way to get students' attention in the garden - maybe a rhythmic clap, call and response word, whistle, bell, "*if you hear my voice, touch your chin!*", and make sure kids know what you expect when they hear this signal. (Gather round? Line up?)
9. **Don't face students towards the sun:** It seems simple, but we often forget that students might be struggling to pay attention if they are facing the sun while we are giving instructions.
10. **Get as much support as possible:** When you can, enlist parents, volunteers, other teachers, and community members to assist in the garden. An ideal ratio is 1 adult to 5 students but this is often not possible. If you are the only adult with a large group of students, be sure to have a consistent set of expectations and consequences.
11. **Have fun!** Remember that your passion will be the best model for student learning. Use age-appropriate games, songs, stories, and hands-on activities, as well as small celebrations for accomplishments.



How to Water Efficiently

Some people might think that watering plants is a very simple task...and it certainly *can* be once you know a few things about how plants and soil work! Water is a precious resource and it's important that we use it efficiently and wisely.

THE HANDIEST WATERING TOOL

What's the most useful tool for watering the garden?

You might be surprised that it's not a special watering nozzle or a fancy moisture gauge – it's actually something you *always* have with you – your finger!

CHECK THE SOIL

- Stick a finger *a few inches down into the soil*, near the **root** of the plant(s) that you are thinking about watering. If the soil still feels moist, the area doesn't need watering just yet, so move on to another plant or another bed.
- It's also important to use your finger to gauge when the soil has started to absorb the water and the moisture is soaking past the surface and down toward plant roots. *Check for this regularly while watering!*

WATER TEMPERATURE = COOL

- *Make sure the water is cool before watering anything.* Water can get pretty hot after sitting in a rubber hose in the sun for even a few minutes and that hot water can damage plants, especially young ones. Find an established tree or shrub to let the warm/hot water run onto until the water runs cool.

FIND THE RIGHT SETTING

- Most nozzles have multiple settings so it's important to select one that will not damage plants. Also remember that most nozzles give you the ability to change the water pressure as well.
 - "Shower" or "Garden" = young or adult plants
 - "Soaker" or "Shrub" = bushes or trees

WET THE SOIL

- After checking to make sure the plants actually need water, wet the soil around them but don't worry about making sure the soil is soaked just yet. Let that light watering break the surface of the soil and then come back shortly after to give the plants a good soaking.

GIVE THE PLANTS A GOOD DRINK

- Water under and around the plants, near their roots.
 - Avoid watering leaves/flowers of plants as it can encourage disease. Plants drink with their roots!
 - Remember to use your finger to check near plant roots and see if the water is soaking into the soil.
- Let the soil dry out, down an inch or two, before you water again another day. Most plants don't like to live a soggy life.