

## Winter Garden Lesson Ideas for Garden Parents

Here are 10 broad ideas for winter garden activities to share with class teachers. They will also have ideas for how the garden can tie into their grade's curriculum; Math and Science are easy, but don't forget English, Art, Social Studies! The garden can be inspiration for writing poems and stories, drawing and sculpting, playing 20 questions, or how native cultures and ancient civilizations interacted with the natural world: creation myths, celebrations, customs and traditions, etc.

- 1) check growth of cover crops sown in fall, why can some plants tolerate the cold and others die? talk about native vs. non-native plants – what does the expression 'cold hardy' mean? Are YOU a cold hardy person?!
- 2) chart which plants stay 'green' and which go 'brown' - walk around the school to find deciduous trees (lose their leaves) and coniferous (evergreens keep their leaves) - talk about annuals vs. perennials in the garden too - are there weeds that stay green all year? what about the kale and broccoli plants?
- 3) collect trash in the garden - how does it get in there? why? who is littering? Create a scavenger hunt with clues/riddles or have them create the riddles!
- 4) look at dry seed pods and flower heads: compare & contrast, collect any seeds still out there, start them indoors - will they grow? plant some outdoors if ground still soft - will they sprout? plant some outside under a glass jar - does the jar trap heat? where does the heat come from? will the heat help the seeds sprout? why do plants wait until spring to sprout?
- 5) look for signs of wildlife in the garden - birds, bugs, squirrels, deer tracks and scat (poop) - which animals hibernate? dig into the compost and measure the temperature in there - is it warmer than the air? can you still find worms and bugs in the soil even when it freezes? what are the animals eating in winter? look for berries in the garden - why are berries colorful?
- 6) make birdfeeders to hang in the garden (just don't use peanut butter due to allergies!) - use suet - or string popcorn garlands - how often do you have to refill? is it hard for animals to find food in winter?
- 7) go beyond the garden to the outdoor classroom at James Pond to observe the woods in winter - do the woods really 'sleep'? how different does it feel to take a walk in the woods compared to a walk in the school garden? How do you know if an environment is 'wild' or if people have created it?

- 8) chart temperature, precipitation and weather (sunny, cloudy, windy, etc.) in the garden every week - students can also choose one plant to observe weekly or monthly in the garden over entire winter - how does it change? why? They can write about the plant in their science or garden journals.
- 9) grow paperwhite bulbs indoors in the classroom to chart growth, or try sprouting seeds from fruits and veggies students eat for snack or at lunch. Start a 'seed collection' of these found seeds and then look at the diversity of shapes/textures/patterns. Do people use shapes found in nature in our own art? Is nature a form of art? Is art only human? Can a bird's nest or wasp nest be a form of art too? Why do people make art?
- 10) If temperatures are too cold you can always bring the garden indoors - collect materials outside and bring them into the classroom to explore under magnifying glasses and microscopes: leaves, compost, soil, dried plant parts, etc. Bring in houseplants to explore – construct a mini terrarium for the classroom as a 'microenvironment' or have students make their own microenvironments with found items in shoeboxes – a desert, ocean, forest, field, stream etc.