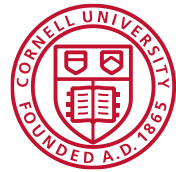


Cornell Cooperative Extension Cornell Garden-Based Learning



Playful Plants: Engaging Children in the Garden



Varies depending on how much time and effort you are willing to invest

Learning Objective(s): Participants will...

- Identify playful plants by mindfully engaging their five senses when perusing a garden of choice, to the extent that the garden allows.
- Understand how to facilitate the use of tools meant to increase children's engagement in a botanic garden.



Two opportunities to help engage children in gardens are listed below, along with a bonus activity. Choose an activity based upon your target age-group and the time you are willing to invest, or do all three!

Engagement Opportunity 1:

This activity is suited for those of any age and can be best in situations where there are not many adults available to supervise the children. This can be done directly before an event or can remain a part of the garden for an extended period of time.



Supplies:

- Small sensory signs (around 4" x 6") preferably printed on sturdy green paper. Four signs fit one standard sheet of paper, see "Sensory Signs" in "Print Materials."
- *Note: You will go into your garden to determine how many of these signs to print.*
- 1 dark colored marker
- Sticks or stakes to mount the signs upon
- Tape as needed, to mount the signs
- 1 Pen or Pencil
- "My Playful Plants: Sensory" PDF (found in "Print Materials") OR 1 Notebook
- *Optional: "Playful Plants List" PDF (found in "Print Materials")*

Preparation

- 1) Go to your garden of choice with a writing utensil and either the "My Playful Plants: Sensory" PDF or a notebook.

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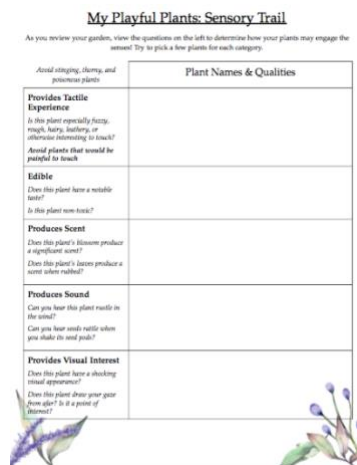
Diversity and Inclusion are a part of Cornell University's heritage. We are a recognized employer and educator valuing AA/EEO, Protected Veterans, and Individuals with Disabilities.

- Stand in a place you think people tend to gravitate to (this is often the middle of the garden). At this time, you are going to take a moment to be mindful and choose which plants you will encourage children to engage with – the “playful plants.”

If you have the “My Playful Plants: Sensory” PDF:

3) Consider the questions in each section of the PDF, and try to choose plants that engage a wide variety of senses. Additionally, please see the tips in the box below.

4) Write the name of each plant you choose in the most appropriate section of the PDF. Try to select at least one plant for each box, if possible.



If you have a notebook:

3) Please see the tips in the box below and consider the following questions as you select playful plants: *What plants have colors that stand out? Strong scents? Is there a berry or fruit in season that a child could taste? Is there an especially soft plant? Do any plants rustle loudly in the wind?*

4) Write the names of these plants in your notebook, and which sense(s) they stimulate. Try to choose plants that engage a wide variety of senses (rather than, for instance, only choosing plants that are visually stimulating).

Tips to Keep in Mind when Choosing Playful Plants

- Focus on plants that would capture the eye of a child – ones that are low to the ground!
- Try to choose plants that would be accessible for all, or most.
In other words, it would be best if they could be reached from the primary path that goes through the garden.
- You can also choose plants with fun names! (e.g. Sedum Fuzzy Wuzzy)
- Notice the plants surrounding the one you are provoking engagement with.
 - If you are encouraging children to taste the fruit of one plant, make sure that plant is not next to another that is highly poisonous.*
 - If you are encouraging children to touch a soft plant, make sure it is not directly next to another that is extremely sharp or painful to the touch.*
- You may refer to the “Playful Plants List” PDF (found in “Print Materials”) for additional help!

- Take this list back to a computer where you are able to print from. Refer to the “Sensory Signs” PDF found in “Print Materials.” Print enough signs to account for each sensory-

stimulating plant you chose, preferably on sturdy light green paper. Pages 1-5 of this PDF each contain 4 signs for each of the five senses. The sixth page includes four different signs, one for each sense except sight.

Note: You may choose to laminate these if you are planning on using them repetitively.

- 6) Write the name of the plant in the "Plant Name" section with a dark colored marker. You may choose to write the common name, botanical name, or both depending on your intended audience.
 - If you are hoping to engage younger children (age 8 and below), it may be best to write the common name, especially if the plant has a funny name!
 - For older children or adults, the botanical name may be a better option.
- 7) Attach these signs to the available stakes using tape.
- 8) Place the signs near the desired plants. See below for an example.



Experience: Children will stroll through the garden and interact with plants as the signs indicate is appropriate. This can be used during a supervised event to add a child-friendly aspect to the garden, or these signs can remain posted for extended periods of time.

Engagement Opportunity 2:

These activities can be catered towards enhancing events or can be a standby activity to increase children's engagement in your garden.

Choose between Bingo and a Scavenger Hunt depending on your target age-group!

Plan A – Use our Prefilled Examples

This plan works best if there is little time to prepare, and if the garden includes a diverse array of plants.

Supplies:

- "Nature Bingo: Pre-Filled" (ages 8 and below) or "Nature Scavenger Hunt: Pre-Filled" (ages 9 and up). Each of these can be found in "Print Materials."
- Writing utensils, preferably markers
- *Option 1:* Waterproof box
- *Option 2:* Small prize (stickers, etc.)

Preparation

Option 1:

- 1) Print 15-20 of both Nature Bingo and the Nature Scavenger Hunt.
- 2) Label a waterproof box and leave these examples, along with some cheap writing utensils, in a well-traveled area, like near the maps of your botanic garden for individuals to use at their own leisure.

Option 2 – For an Event:

- 1) Print enough examples for your expected audience (Nature Bingo for children age 8-, Nature

Plan B – Use our Templates

This plan works best when you have a little more time, and you are looking to use a tool specific to your garden.

Supplies:

- "Nature Bingo" (ages 8 and below) or "Nature Scavenger Hunt" (ages 9 and up) templates. Each of these can be found in "Print Materials."
- Writing utensils, preferably markers
- Notebook
- Pen or pencil
- *Option 1:* Waterproof box
- *Option 2:* Small prize (stickers, etc.)

Preparation

- 1) Access the Bingo or Scavenger Hunt templates in "Print Materials." You may review suggestions of the types of things you would include, listed in the documents below the templates. For the Bingo card, there are small cartoon images accompanying the template that you may use to create your own activity more easily.
- 2) Follow steps 1-3 from "Engagement Opportunity 1: Preparation" and see

Scavenger Hunt for children 9+) for a given event.

- 2) Hand these out at the event, along with writing utensils and/or something to write on (clipboard, etc.) and offer a small prize (sticker, fruit snacks, etc.) for putting effort into completing the activity.

“Tips” to choose interesting and engaging plants in your garden.

- 3) Write down what loose parts you may have laying around (seeds, branches, rocks).
- 4) Write down what insects appear frequently (butterflies, ants, bees, etc.)
- 5) Return to your template of choice and fill in the most interesting and diverse array of items for children to find. Feel free to refer to our prefilled examples for further guidance as you assemble your activity!

Option 1:

- 1) Print 15-20 of both Nature Bingo and the Nature Scavenger Hunt.
- 2) Label a waterproof box and leave these examples, along with some cheap writing utensils, near the maps of your botanic garden for individuals to use at their own leisure.

Option 2 – For an Event:

- 1) Print enough examples for your expected audience (Nature Bingo for children age 8-, Nature Scavenger Hunt for children 9+) for a given event.
- 2) Hand these out at the event, along with writing utensils and/or something to write on (clipboard, etc.) and offer a small prize (sticker, fruit snacks, etc.) for putting effort into completing the activity.

Nature Scavenger Hunt

- Find a droopy tree
- Find a plant that smells really bad, or really strong
- Find a tree with rough or peely bark
- Find two flowers that look unique
- Find a leaf with really jagged, rough edges
- Find a fuzzy or hairy plant
- Find a really weird looking insect
- Find two different seeds
- Find an herb you could cook with
- Find a comfortable patch of shade to relax

Check off any that you find...

try to find them all!

Nature Scavenger Hunt

- [insert text here]
- [insert text here]
- [insert text here]
- [insert text here]
- [insert text here]
- [insert text here]
- [insert text here]
- [insert text here]
- [insert text here]
- [insert text here]

Check off any that you find...

try to find them all!

NATURE BINGO

Circle each one that you find... try to find all 9!

 Find a Fruit Tree or Berry Bush!	 Find a Leaf that Smells Good!	 Find a Hiding Place!
 Find a Flower that feels Soft or Fuzzy to touch!	 Find Something a Plant Dropped!	 Find a Tree with Rough or Shaggy Bark!
 Find a Grass you could Weave or Braid!	 Find an Insect that Flies!	 Find a Pink or Yellow Flower!

NATURE BINGO

Circle each one that you find... try to find all 9!

Find a [describe your visually stimulating plant here]!	Find a [describe your tactically stimulating (soft or rough feeling) plant here]!	Find a [plant you could use to hide OR a plant you could climb on]!
Find a [describe your garden's focal point here]!	Find a [describe a seed, branch, or other loose part your plant drops here]!	Find a [describe your smelly plant here]!
Find a [describe a piece of wildlife, like a small mammal or insect, here]!	Find a [tasty plant you don't mind children trying, or a plant of your choosing]!	Find a [describe a plant you'd like to attract attention to here, or a water feature/water plant]!

Reflect on the experience:

What did children find interesting?

What could be improved for another similar event or activity?

How could you build upon this activity to further children's engagement?



Bonus Activity: Fairy House (or Troll House) Station

Suited for all ages, especially younger children

Best with ample supervision

Supplies:

- 2 wide and shallow bins (**recommended size?**)
- Enough sand or dirt to cover the bottom of one bin (**recommended amt?**)
- Child-safe glue

Pick and choose from the following as desired or necessary:

Natural Materials:

- Moss
- Small twigs
- Small wildflowers
- Hollowed out gourds
- Small rocks
- Seeds and Seed Pods (acorns, dandelion seeds, any that are plentiful and available but not sharp)
- Bark from Trees (shed from Sycamores, Birches, etc.)
- Feathers
- Pinecones

Artificial Materials:

- Popsicle sticks
- Glitter glue
- Construction paper
- Googly eyes
- Markers
- Small terra cotta or nursery pots



Preparation:

- 1) Find a couple of example fairy houses that you really enjoy, that you have the materials to produce. Images of our examples can be seen throughout this activity guide. Pinterest is a wonderful place to search for other examples if need be.
- 2) Create a couple of model fairy houses that children may choose to use for guidance.

- 3) Fill one shallow bin about a quarter of the way with dirt and lay some of the parts that you have available in that bin. This bin may be for those who wish to just play with the available parts, or build a temporary fairy house, but perhaps not take it home with them.
- 4) The other bin may be for a “group project,” where many children are contributing to one large fairy house, and for those who wish to glue things together to take them home. Any remaining supplies should go in this bin, especially the glue. You may choose to pre-glue some pieces of your example (see image to the right) for children to use to make the process more efficient.



Experience:

At least one adult should supervise these bins as children play with the available materials and construct their own fairy and troll houses. Adults should be open to helping children construct these, and answering questions like “What kind of moss/seed is this?” Adults should determine whether children would like to take home their creation. If so, the fairy house should be built upon (or transferrable to) a paper plate.

Reflect on the experience:

What did children find interesting?

What could be improved for another similar event or activity?

How could you build upon this activity to further children’s engagement?

