



Civic Garden Center
of Greater Cincinnati

52 Weeks in the School Garden

A guide to garden tasks and ideas
for every week of the year



Civic Garden Center
of Greater Cincinnati

School Garden Lessons: **Winter**

These weekly lesson ideas align with seasonal garden tasks. Feel free to use your own ideas and brainstorm with other teachers too! Mark your calendars with the [school garden workshops](#) being offered at the Civic Garden Center.

First Week of January

- Take pictures of the garden in winter. These can be used for lessons about seasons or to document and share student progress in the garden from month to month or year to year.
- Check your calendar and schedule times for garden lessons with the Civic Garden Center. Contact Civic Garden Center Youth Education Department at 513.221.0981 or youtheducation@civicgardencenter.org.

Second Week of January

- Make a dream garden collage from seed catalogues. This could create opportunities to learn about companion plants or the difference between annuals and perennials. Tips for acquiring free seed catalogues can be found [here](#).
- Create a gardening schedule. Communicate with other teachers, gardening clubs or other organizations to solidify who will be in the garden at what times, where things will be planted and who will take on the responsibilities of watering and weeding.

Third Week of January

- Discuss adaptations for surviving winter. Students could observe and document different characteristics and behaviors of plants and animals they see in winter. Students could then create their own plant or animal with winter adaptations.
- Expand and communicate with your garden volunteer network. Communicate with parents, faculty, community members, administration or local organizations to recruit volunteers to support your class in the garden. Visit our teacher workshop archive for tips on [involving community partners](#).

Last Week of January

- Collect winter weather data. Use tools to collect temperature, wind speed and direction, and precipitation. Have students record cloud observations and identify what the cloud characteristics indicate. Create a weather section similar to that seen in the local newspaper.
- Schedule a garden kick off in mid-March. Invite all of your volunteers and partner organizations. Their help will be crucial to keeping the garden watered over spring break. Visit our [Involving Community Partners](#) page for support.

First Week of February

- Grow a microgreen salad. Microgreens are fast growing food crops that provide nutritional benefits and grow easily on a windowsill. More information about micro-greens can be found [here](#).
- Create stepping stones. One simple method for creating stepping stones can be found [here](#) on the Family Crafts website. This activity creates opportunities for students to form positive connections to the garden, even in winter.

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Second Week of February

- Create a map of the garden. This should include the layout of the beds, what's growing, and what you plan to plant. It's also a great way to practice creating models with scale and cardinal directions.
- Check your water source for the garden. Be sure the pipes, hoses, and watering cans still work properly and are sufficient for watering your garden beds. Thinking about a rain barrel? Contact the Civic Garden Center Youth Education Department at 513.221.0981 or youtheducation@civiggardencenter.org for ideas and resources!

Third Week of February

- Begin growing spring & summer crops indoors. Contact the Civic Garden Center Youth Education Department at youtheducation@civiggardencenter.org for your free spring seed package and help choosing the right lights and soil mixture for indoor growing.
- Conduct experiments on indoor plants using different growth mediums, light levels or water variations. This is a great way to practice using the scientific method and students could even choose their own variables.

Last Week of February

- Make seed mats. Incorporate mapping and math skills by planning out the garden on graph paper and including research on square foot gardening methods. Create [seed tape or mats](#) with the students. Ask the students to explain why the seeds need to be spaced appropriately.
- Plant under low tunnels. One advantage of the low tunnels is that they allow us to plant our spring seeds earlier in the year. This brings on earlier harvests before school lets out for summer.

First Week of March

- Trace food journeys. Where does our food come from? It's easy to forget where our food comes from when we don't have our blooming gardens to remind us. Discuss or research different climates around the nation or world and what food is grown. The relationships between culture and climate could also be explored.
- Organize seeds you collected this fall. Create seed packages. Decide if you'd like to use the seeds in the school garden or sell for a fundraiser. Check out [Seed Savers Exchange](#) for resources targeting the why, how and stories about saving seeds.

Second Week of March

- Review strategies for outdoor classroom management. To ensure both enjoyable and successful trips to the garden for you and your students. We have a collection of resources for [Managing Student Behavior Outdoors](#) on our website.
- Remind your students to bring gardening attire to school. This could be an extra pair of shoes, shirt, hat or even gardening gloves. These items could be kept at school so they are at hand for Civic Garden Center lessons or other class trips to the garden.

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School Garden Lessons: **Early Spring**

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Third Week of March

- Plant outdoors with your students. The Civic Garden Center blogs for guidance with [square foot gardening](#) and [seed mats](#). After planting outdoors, be sure to water your seeds frequently. For tips on watering the garden visit [here](#).
- Turn the compost bin to keep it aerated and free of odors.

Fourth Week of March

- Celebrate the [Spring Equinox](#), read a story or have reading groups outdoors, create a graph of the different flower characteristics, or act out the position of the sun and Earth during spring.
- Record plant growth. Survey the garden. Is there anything else you need for a successful spring season? Contact the Civic Garden Center Youth Education Department at 513.221.0981 or youtheducation@civiggardencenter.org with questions and ideas.

Last Week of March

- Design and build rain water gauges to collect and measure rainfall over the course of the spring. Create a chart or graph to display this data and look for patterns.
- Expand and communicate with your garden volunteer network. Communicate with parents, faculty, community members, administration or local organizations to recruit volunteers to support your class in the garden.

First Week of April

- Choose a day this week to save compostable scraps from lunch and add them to the compost bin. For tips on composting visit our [website](#).
- Look for signs of the spring season. Record the weather for the week to find patterns. This is a great way to teach math, science and critical thinking skills in one lesson.

Second Week of April

- Planting again. Weather data. Look for patterns and changes in temperature, rain fall, length of day, etc. How do these changes impact the garden?
- Jot down a few notes on your garden progress. Record planting dates, germination dates, weather events, etc. Keep this information in a safe place as it could be used as a resource for the future.

Third Week of April

- Celebrate Earth Day! Brainstorm with your students about ways to help the environment on Earth Day and every day! Design a plan and achieve your goals together!
- Thin plants and remove weeds if your garden seems over crowded. For support and ideas on thinning, view our blog on [Thinning](#) on the Civic Garden Center website.

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School Garden Lessons: **Spring**

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Fourth Week of April

- Gather flowers to be used in May for Mother's Day gifts and cards. Press the flowers prevent decomposition and maintain appearance. One method that can be used is to place the flowers flat in the pages of a book and then weigh the book down, usually with other books, and remove after 2 weeks.
- Practice garden reflections. Think back to the garden in March, how was it different? Use your senses to describe the plants and animals you observe in the garden.

First Week of May

- Water the beds. Check the rain gauge to see how much rain has fallen since you last visited the garden. Remember, vegetables need about an inch of rain per week.
- Set a date for a harvest party. Determine what you'll need (plates, forks, dressing, etc.). Decide if you'd like to invite parents or pair with another classroom to spread the garden cheer! Send out invites, reminders and/or sign-ups.

Second Week of May

- Enjoy the garden! Head to the garden to read a story, look at clouds, count flowers or observe insects and animals.
- Remove any unwanted plants and add them to the compost.

Third Week of May

- Measure the height and width of the plants in the garden. Use guide books and keys to identify plants growing or use your senses to describe their characteristics.
- Plant summer crops. Be sure to talk with other teachers, staff, families or groups that might plan on using the garden over the summer. Collaborate to plant cover crops, sunflower seeds & beans. Contact the Civic Garden Center Youth Education Department at 513.221.0981 or youtheducation@civiggardencenter.org with questions and ideas.

Fourth Week of May

- Harvest a spring salad. Bring scissors and a bowl with you to the garden. Demonstrate what and how to harvest produce. Have all students harvest and contribute. You could also bring ingredients to make a dressing! For ideas on creating your own salad dressing click [here](#).
- Carefully look at plants in the garden and the perimeter of the garden to make sure there aren't any unwanted pests nibbling on your plants.

Fifth Week of May

- Investigate food webs. Look for signs of interactions between members of the garden food web. How is everything connected?
- Clean and inventory tools. Begin thinking about plans for the garden next school year!

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School Garden Lessons: Summer

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First Week of June

- Carefully look at plants in the garden and the perimeter of the garden to make sure there aren't any unwanted pests nibbling on your plants. Make sure your fence or garden area is secure for the summer break.

Second Week of June

- Research grants to support your gardening efforts. Read the Civic Garden Center's [Grant Writing Basics](#) page for ideas about finding and writing grants. Communicate with administration, committees, other faculty, or community members to find ways to collaborate on the grant.

Third Week of June

- Sign up for gardening or environment focused professional development sessions through your local district, the [Civic Garden Center](#), [Project Wild](#) or [Project Learning Tree](#).

Fourth Week of June

- Spending time outdoors and in the garden can support your students in their social, emotional, and academic growth. Brainstorm a good time during the school year (15- 30 minutes weekly, monthly, etc.) when students can plan to play a game in the garden, read a story, complete garden chores or engage an activity from our [garden lessons](#).

First Week of July

- Create a garden calendar and invite other teachers to sign-up for times to use the garden. Share ideas for what to do in the garden. Encourage everyone to view the garden as a community space, instead of a chore for one teacher or class.

Second Week of July

- Check your calendar and schedule times for garden lessons with the Civic Garden Center. Contact the Youth Education Department at [513.221.0981](tel:513.221.0981) or youtheducation@civicgardencenter.org.
- Book a field trip to visit the Civic Garden Center for a [Compost Kids or Green Learning Station program](#).

Third Week of July

- Reach out to your classroom families to help support your class when you visit the garden. Create a sign-up sheet with different volunteer options. Helping in the garden could look like volunteering to help students in the garden, working in the garden after school, donating seeds and garden tools, etc.

Fourth Week of July

- Invite local bee keepers and Master Gardeners to your class for presentations or garden support. The Civic Garden Center Youth Education Department can support you in completing this task and can be reached at [513.221.0981](tel:513.221.0981) or youtheducation@civicgardencenter.org.

First Week of August

- Visit the garden. How are things looking? Contact the Civic Garden Center Youth Education Department at [513.221.0981](tel:513.221.0981) or youtheducation@civicgardencenter.org with questions or for support!

Second Week of August

- Attend the [Civic Garden Center's Fall Seed Giveaway](#) teacher workshop.

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School Garden Lessons: **Late Summer**

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Third Week of August

- Survey the garden. Introduce the garden to new students and ask them to study the plants growing there. Even if they don't know each plant name they can record observations and map out the garden. Start to clear the garden for planting, adding weeds to the compost.
- Explore seed diversity. Gather seeds from harvested produce or fall seed packages and record their characteristics. Hypothesize why some seeds are different from others. Create a seed museum in your classroom. Have students write a key to identify each type of seed. You are welcome to use our [garden lessons](#) for more ideas!

Fourth Week of August

- Design germination experiments. Determine variables to test in the garden such as the amount of water, sunlight, soil, etc. that is needed for optimal plant growth. Don't forget to set up a control for comparison.
- Make seed mats. Incorporate mapping and math skills by planning out the garden on graph paper and including research on square foot gardening methods. Create [seed tape or mats](#) with the students. Ask the students to explain why the seeds need to be spaced appropriately.

Last Week of August

- Sow early spring seeds outdoors. Use your seed mats and be sure to label each planting so you know what to expect as the seedlings emerge. Read our blog on [square foot gardening](#).
- Ensure regular watering. Keep track of daily weather including temperatures and precipitation. Edibles require at least one inch of rain per week. Use a rain gauge and keep seeds moist to promote germination. Read our blog on [Proper Watering](#).

First Week of September

- Practice weed identification. Record leaf characteristics and have a weed pulling competition to see who can gather the most! Add the weeds to the compost pile. For more information read our blog on [Weeds, Weeds, Weeds](#).
- Record plant growth. Measure stems and leaves of the same plant each week. Create a graph to show the growth over time.

Second Week of September

- Plant fall crops. Successive plantings allow students to practice proper planting techniques and reinforce previous learning. It also ensures a constant harvest of fresh, tender leaves for salads!
- Save seeds to plant next year. Harvest seeds and store them in a brown paper bag in a cool, dry place. Mark the bag with the seed type and plan to perform germination tests in the spring. For more ideas, take a look at our [garden lessons](#).

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School Garden Lessons: **Fall**

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Third Week of September

- Record observations about the weather. Take time to write down the temperature range, amount of precipitation, wind speed and direction, etc. Continue to record these factors as summer transitions into fall.
- Celebrate the equinox. Research modern and historical fall equinox celebrations. Ask students to discuss their findings and develop a class plan for celebrating the changing seasons.

Last Week of September

- Document seasonal changes. Hypothesize why the leaves change colors. Take photos of the same plant each week and create a timeline as the plant grows. View our [garden lessons](#) for more ideas!
- Research plant life cycles. Some plants are annuals and some are perennials. Annuals will grow for one season and die after they produce seeds. Perennials will grow for many seasons. List examples from the garden of each type of plant.

First Week of October

- Observe shadows. Go outside and find interesting shadows. If the shadow is on a paved surface, use chalk to outline the shadow and revisit the same spot later in the day to observe if the shadow is in the same place.
- Experiment with decomposition. Place a carrot outdoors either under the soil or in the compost and record the rate of decomposition that occurs. Keep a carrot indoors and compare the two after several days. View our [garden lessons](#) for more ideas!

Second Week of October

- Research traditional uses for sunflowers. Sunflower seeds have been grown and harvested for thousands of years. Create posters to present student research as you observe the end of the sunflower's life cycle and growing season.
- Search for caterpillars. Caterpillars feed on leaves before they form a chrysalis or cocoon. Looking for their bite marks on leaves is a great way to find them! Research what the caterpillars will look like as adult butterflies.

Third Week of October

- Gather leaves from around your school and start a collection. Ask a local naturalist to help you identify the types of plants each leaf came from. View our [garden lessons](#) for support and inspiration.
- Find tree seeds. Acorns, pinecones, Osage orange fruits, sweet gum balls, walnuts and buckeyes are just a few of the seeds that will be falling from trees in our area. See how many different types you can find!

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School Garden Lessons: Fall

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Last Week of October

- Plant cold hardy crops. Successive plantings allow students to practice proper planting techniques and reinforce previous learning. It also ensures a constant harvest of fresh, tender leaves for salads! Additional ideas for aligning garden harvesting and tasting with standards can be found in our [garden lessons](#).
- Research jack lantern traditions as Halloween approaches. Consider collecting jack lanterns after the holiday to add to compost pile. Students can turn the compost with a fork to accelerate the decomposition process. Support for [composting at school](#) can be found on the Hamilton County Recycles website.

First Week of November

- Adopt a tree. Find a tree close to the school that can be easily observed throughout the year. Visit the tree weekly and document changes that occur in the leaves, buds and bark. Create a photo journal of your adopted tree.
- Add season extension hardware. Creating a low tunnel or building a cold frame will enable the plants to continue growing into the cooler months. Our [Adding a Low Tunnel blog](#) describes the materials and building process for a low tunnel.

Second Week of November

- Pull out spent plants and add them to the compost. Clear out beds that aren't going to be covered and top them off with finished compost that has been aged over several seasons. Consider growing a cover crop to enrich the soil.
- Research Thanksgiving traditions. Create crafts with dried gourds and other natural items to display in the classroom. Share the history of Thanksgiving and the natural items involved in the celebration.

Third Week of November

- Plant perennials, spring blooming bulbs, and garlic. It's important to remind students, and ourselves, the importance of planning as we think of the garden as a continuous cycle with seasons that relate to each other rather than stand apart.
- Enjoy the harvest. Plan a harvest party with your students and advertise your garden to table event. Invite parents and community partners to attend. Mix up a simple salad dressing to top it all off! Here are tips [for cooking with students](#).

Last Week of November

- Cook a dish using seasonal produce. Have a discussion about the plant parts we eat. Students could research why certain foods are eaten at Thanksgiving. For resources and ideas on classroom management while cooking, recipes, and cooking lessons aligned with standards view [cooking with students](#) and our [garden lessons](#).
- Write a poem in the garden. Take a quiet break to observe the garden and consider what you can be thankful for this

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School Garden Lessons: Late Fall & Early Winter

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First Week of December

- Practice reflection. Have students reflect on their fall school garden experiences. They could document changes they saw, things they are thankful for and what they think will happen in the winter and spring. Observations and data related to weather and seasonal characteristics could be discussed or documented.

Second Week of December

- Describe the December garden. Make detailed observations in the form of notes, measurements or sketches about the plants growing or traces of animal life.
- Take inventory tools and identify items that need to be sharpened, repaired or replaced. This create opportunity for garden supplies to be fixed, donated or gifted for Christmas! What a fun way to involve and build community!

Third Week of December

- Make holiday cards. These cards could be used for writing warm wishes or students could write facts about the flowers and or gardening on the cards. Either way, these cards are a great addition to classrooms and homes!
- Add bird friendly plants. Research plants that help sustain birds and other wildlife that stay during the winter (ex. Cardinals). Visit the library and take time to observe the garden and make notes.

Fourth Week of December

- Celebrate the Winter Solstice. Use the newspaper or other online sources to have students track the hours of daylight between sunrise and sunset before and after the winter solstice. Create graphs with this data and have students look for patterns. For other lesson ideas for celebrating the Winter Solstice view [Education World's: Celebrate Winter!](#)
- Add color to the garden. This is a fun way to inspire interest and pride in the garden from students and the surrounding community during the gloomy winter months. Hang ornaments, scarves and ribbons that are created by your students from natural products.

Last Week of December

- Research grants to support your gardening efforts. Read the Civic Garden Center's [Grant Writing Basics](#) page for ideas about finding and writing grants. Communicate with administration, committees, other faculty, and community members to collaborate on a grant.
- Write a garden song. When working in the garden it is helpful to have a little song to sing. Encourage the students to create simple rhymes that can be used when the spring weeding and watering is back.

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