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This information  
has been reviewed by  
university faculty.

Once you know gardening basics, it's fun to be creative! Many parts of your classroom curriculum can be incorporated in gardening. You can plant Butterfly Gardens, Bat Gardens, Pizza Gardens, Salsa Gardens, Dinosaur Gardens or build Sunflower Houses with your younger students. A simple idea like an ABC garden with a plant to match each letter can make learning the alphabet a bit more interesting when you break up the day by visiting your garden. It's an ideal situation for an older class to organize for the younger children in the school.



### ABC Gardens

An easy long-row garden to make is the ABC Garden. Pick flowers or herbs that match each letter of the alphabet and have a large painted letter nearby to help children identify it. For example:

A=Aster, B=Butterfly Weed. Experience textures by planting Lamb's Ear, a wooly herb. Use highly scented herbs like mints for M for a different experience. Remember that you want to have the plant growing, preferably in bloom, during the school year. For example, sunflowers (for the letter S) would be popular, but wouldn't bloom until May. Sunflowers are frost tender and should be planted in early spring.

A local middle school with industrial tech classes may have students who would be eager to make the wooden letters for you.

### Bat Gardens

The southwest is an area frequented by nectar feeding and insect feeding bats. Often primary classes focus on bats and many of the misconceptions about them. Nectar feeding bats are attracted to columnar cacti, agaves and yuccas so planting these on your school grounds may bring bats into your garden but there are no guarantees. Nectar bats are primarily in areas where these types of plants are abundant. Probably the best way for gardeners to attract insect eating bats is to provide a water source like a pool, fountain, etc. Bats drink from these water sources and eat insects near by. You may also want to install a bat



# Specialty Gardens: Fun Ideas for Connecting the Garden with the Classroom

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house. Even if you don't attract bats, you will have created a great environment for learning about them.

### Butterfly Gardens



What better way to study the life cycle of butterflies, than to have the flowers and plants they favor right in your own garden? The excitement of finding eggs on a host plant, the fun of watching caterpillars eat, the wonder of the construction of the cocoon and the amazing emergence of a butterfly all can happen in your garden if you choose the right plants. Butterflies lay their eggs on plants that will provide good food for the caterpillars that will hatch from the eggs. Be sure to protect the caterpillars which will one day become butterflies. Most butterflies feed on flowers with large exposed sites to easily obtain nectar, such as members of the sunflower or zinnia family. They are attracted to gardens with lots of color, especially bright, vibrant colors with striking contrasts. Remember, plants that attract butterflies during the day often attract the nocturnal moths during the evening hours. The following plants are listed by planting times:

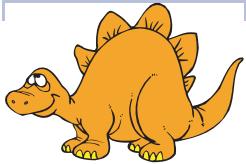
**FALL (Annuals & Perennials):** asters, shasta daisy, purple cornflower, hollyhocks (larval host plant), nicotiana, petunia, phlox, coneflowers, black-eyed susan, gaillardia, pincushion flower and salvia.

**FALL (Wild flowers):** milkweed (larval host plant), butterfly weed (larval host plant), desert aster, desert zinnia, Arizona zinnia, tithonia, or Mexican sunflower, joe-pye weeds, ox-eye daisy, gilias, verbena, bigelow's aster, indian paintbrush, purple coneflower, phlox, desert globe-mallow (larval host plant), black-eyed susan, any member of the sunflower family, coreopsis, liatris, pentas, jupiter's beard, and coral bells.

**SPRING (Annual):** cosmos, sunflowers, French marigolds (*tagetes*) zinnias and sage.

**HERBS:** yarrow, hyssop, mints, lavender, bee balm, rosemary catnip and pineapple sage.

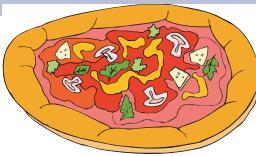
## Dinosaur Gardens



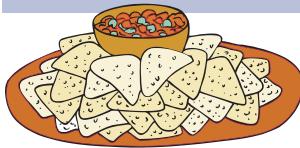
What child isn't enthralled by dinosaurs? If you have a shady area you can grow a garden that would attract those creatures if they lived today. Queen palms, Junipers, Pine and other greenery that predate flowering plants cover the area. Imagine a world without flowers! For the dinosaurs there was just an endless world of various shades of green. Flowering plants were just coming into the world during the dinosaurs' last days. Creating some large painted dinosaurs or a dinosaur egg nearby can give your students a feel for the world as it looked to dinosaurs.

## Pizza Gardens

Think about what goes into making a pizza that grows in a garden: tomatoes, green peppers, onions, garlic, spicy chili peppers, and perhaps herbs like basil, oregano, or parsley. Make a neat sign to mark off their specialty garden. If your school has a home economic class this is a great way to make cooking more nutritious.



## Salsa Gardens



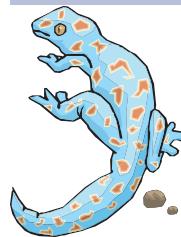
Now change this idea to salsa for a southwestern flavor! Grow a pear tomato (better for sauces), chili peppers, onions, garlic, add herbs like cilantro and you can have salsa as hot as you want. Ever explore how many types of hot chilies there are? You'd be amazed!

## Sunflower Houses

The variety of things you can do with sunflowers seems endless. For young children growing sunflowers is a wonderful experience of learning to measure in inches and centimeters. Did you ever notice how fast they grow in the spring? Remember the ideal planting time is late February; they do not like the cold! Varieties of sunflowers range from the giant Russian and Mammoth types to the maroon-streaked sunset and multi-flowered sunrise. Children love to have places to hide, so plant some in a large circle to frame a "house" for them. Later after they've dried, grow sugar snap peas or sweet peas for the fall. Try growing vining watermelon or cantaloupe during the summer, if you hold classes then, for a cool respite.



## Wildlife Habitat



Imagine a place where native desert wildlife like jackrabbits, ground squirrels or lizards live right near your school. You can grow plants that attract these critters and more (hummingbirds, birds, bats, etc.). The Arizona Game and Fish Department has grants available for schoolyards who create a wildlife habitat on their grounds. For more information, contact them at (602) 789-3520.

[www.azgfd.gov/w\\_c/heritage\\_program.shtml](http://www.azgfd.gov/w_c/heritage_program.shtml)

## Historical Tree Program

American Forests offer trees that grew at the location of historical events, such as the signing of the Declaration of Independence. They have grown new trees from seeds of the original historical tree and are shipped complete with a written explanation of what they've "seen." Contact:



Ms. M. Gail Garretson  
American Forests  
1516 P Street NW  
Washington, D.C. 20005  
(202) 667-3300

Arizona Community Council Tree  
or  
1616 W. Adams  
Phoenix, AZ 85007  
(602) 542-6191

## References

Guy, L. Cromell, C. and Bradley, L. (1996) *Success With School Gardens: how to create a learning oasis in the desert*. Phoenix: Arizona Master Gardeners, Inc.

How to: involve administrators, parents and volunteers; obtain funding and donated supplies; use free publicity to increase community support; improve your soil and choose the best vegetables, flowers and herbs to plant each season; grow healthy, vigorous plants; water effectively for arid climates. ISBN 0-9651987-0-7

Texas A & M University, *JMG Junior Master Gardener Handbook and Leaders Guide*. Available from their website at <http://jmgkids.org> or by mail to JMG Kids, 1515 Emerald Plaza, College Station, TX 77845.

JMG is a program for youth of all ages that uses fun activities to teach horticulture and environmental science concepts.

## Arizona 4-H Youth Gardening website

[ag.arizona.edu/youthgardens](http://ag.arizona.edu/youthgardens)  
A one-step source for information and inspiration.

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