

Materials

- Garden gloves (1 pair per student)
- 10 –20 hand trowels (for garden beds)
- Additional garden tools: hula hoes, rakes, and shovels (for garden pathways)
- (3) 5-gallon plastic buckets for weed debris

Preparation

- Identify garden beds and pathways to be weeded. Place one 5-gallon plastic bucket by each garden bed for weed debris. Mark weeding stations if necessary.
- Arrange large and small tools in a spacious area of the garden for Part 1.
- Identify a variety of common weeds in the garden and collect a few to serve as examples during Part 1. Review weed names.

PROCEDURE

Part 1: Identify Weeds and Introduce Tools

- As a class, gather in a spacious area of the garden. “Regular upkeep is an important part of gardening. Without regular care and attention, garden beds can easily be taken over by weeds.” Introduce pre-collected garden weeds to the group. Pass them around for students to examine.
- Introduce common weed names to the group. Explain how weeds can negatively affect garden plants by competing for vital resources. “It is our job as gardeners to protect our edible crops from outside competition.”
- Demonstrate how to remove small weeds by hand. Using one of the example weeds, show students how to grasp the weed at the base and pull it out of the soil with its root system still intact. Explain the importance of removing the root system along with the upper part of the plant.
- “We can use hand trowels to remove larger weeds. This method enables us to remove as much of the plant’s root as possible.” Demonstrate how to use the hand trowel to remove a weed at its base.
- “The larger tools are not the best choice for weeding newly planted garden beds. These tools can disturb developing plants’ root systems. Therefore, we should only use these tools to remove weeds along the garden pathways.” Introduce each tool and demonstrate how to safely and properly use it.

Part 2: Weed Garden Beds and Pathways

- Divide students into 3 groups. Each group is in charge of weeding one of the following garden beds: sugar snap peas, lettuce, or turnips. Distribute garden gloves. Set aside larger tools for students that finish early; they can work on weeding garden pathways. This is also an ideal job for any students who prefer individual work.
- Lead the entire class to the first weeding station. Point out the food crops in the bed – these are to be left undisturbed. Explain the procedure for weeding the bed. Repeat for following beds, then have groups begin.
 - Snap peas and Lettuce – Carefully remove weeds along rows. Hunt for weeds between plants and gently remove them by hand. Use hand trowels to remove larger weeds along the sides.
 - Turnips – Point out turnip plants to the group. Carefully remove weeds between plants by hand.
- Point out any weeds that have gone to seed and explain why these must be placed in the trash. All other weeds can be placed in 5-gallon plastic buckets and added to the compost pile. When groups have finished, gather buckets and return to the gathering area. As a class, examine the assortment of weeds from each group. “Which weeds were the most common?” Finally, discard of weeds in the compost pile. Collect tools and gloves.

ENGAGE

Gather in a large area of the garden or playground. Have students spread out so that they each have a comfortable radius of personal space. “Imagine you are a plant. You need plenty sun, water, and air to survive.” Have students do their finest plant impressions. “Thankfully, you have enough space to find what you need.” Now, have students move together into a densely packed group. “Uh-oh! You are very close to other plants now. These plants are competing with you for resources. Is it easy to capture enough sunlight on your leaves? Can your roots find enough water to survive?” Introduce the main activity.

Objectives

- Students will understand what weeds are and how they compete with garden crops for vital resources such as sun, water, and air.
- Students will be able to identify common garden weeds and demonstrate how to carefully and completely remove them from the soil.

EXPLAIN

The Art of Weeding

They might get a bad rep, but weeds have feelings, too! Their mission is like that of all other plants – to complete their life cycle from seed to seed, passing on their genetic material from one generation to the next. Unfortunately, these plants happen to be growing in a very undesirable location – our garden beds. Weeds compete with our edible garden crops for vital resources such as sun, water, air, and valuable nutrients in the soil. Weeds aren’t the enemy; they’re just the wrong plant in the wrong place at the wrong time.

As gardeners, it’s our top priority to keep garden beds weed-free. By eliminating weeds, we are freeing up more space for our garden crops to access the resources they need in order to survive. Weeding shouldn’t be limited to garden beds alone. Removing weeds from other areas of the garden is equally as important. If left untouched, these weeds will grow and produce seed. Inevitably, weed seeds will find their way into garden beds, creating a mountain of weeding work for you later on. Remove garden weeds as soon as you spot them, whether they’re in garden beds or along pathways. Pull out plants at the base, removing the tops and as much of the root system as possible. Some garden weeds can regenerate if parts of the roots are left in the soil. Therefore, careful and thorough weeding the first time around ends up saving you more work over the long run.

Seedless weeds can be placed in the compost pile, where they will break down into nutrient-rich humus. Weeds that have gone to seed must be placed in the trash, otherwise they may contaminate the compost pile with tenacious weed seeds. Pay careful attention to types of weeds and sort them into separate piles as you work.

ADDITIONAL CONTENT INTEGRATION *(see previous page)*

Collect some of the most common weeds and bring them back to the classroom. Use a reference book to ID weeds. As an extension of this lesson, have students gather information on each weed. Compile information onto a piece of poster board. Include illustrations, basic information, and any special medicinal/edible uses for each weed.

Additional Materials

- Reference book on common garden weeds (with information on medicinal and edible uses)
- Poster board and markers

EVALUATE

Journal prompt: Why is it important to keep garden beds free of weeds?