



Setting-up

A garden doesn't have to be a row of raised beds, it could be pots on your deck or balcony or a box on your windowsill. Growing plants is a great way to teach kids about life sciences and making healthy food choices. Whether you want to do an experiment or grow some fresh food, this lesson is about different ways to start growing plants from home.

Space/Containers: for large scale gardening in a yard, you can research how to build raised beds or simply lay out rows of soil for planting. If small scale or indoor gardening is your goal, consider having a series of pots or planters. Ceramic pots are typically the best investment- they last a long time, look nice, and can be relatively inexpensive depending on where you shop. If your budget is tight, then I would suggest cheap plastic pots or reusing plastic or glass food containers. Make sure that your containers can drain and that you have a tray or dish for catching water if indoors. You can punch holes into plastic pots with thumb tacks or small nails if needed. Glass doesn't drain so be careful not to over water if you use it. If you plan to grow plants indoors try to place them by a sunny window or artificial light source like a lamp (the south side of a place gets the most sun and the north side gets the least).

Growing transplants from seeds or short-term experiments: If you plan to grow something for a short term science experiment or a type of veggie or flower that typically needs to be started indoors like tomatoes, peppers, leafy greens like lettuces, then using a very small, temporary container would be ideal for you. Garden stores sell very small plastic potting trays for this purpose. You might also consider reusing egg cartons or plastic drinking cups. You will want to water these seeds with a spray bottle rather than a water can until they are larger.

Seeds, cuttings, and transplants: Seeds are the cheapest option for growing and it gives kids a chance to see the entire plant life cycle from start to finish. Cuttings are plant clones grown from plant parts (kitchen scraps or stems/leaves/roots/tubers). They are as cheap as what you paid for your mother plant and are a great model for asexual reproduction. Transplants are plants you typically see in the store that have been started in a greenhouse for you to repot in your own garden. This is the most expensive option but more doable if you do not have access to seeds, your seedlings don't survive, or the seeding season for the plant you want to grow has passed. In this series we will go over how to do each method.

Pierce Conservation District – Environmental Education Garden Series

Soil: Unfortunately, unless you have acres of land and a tool for tilling, there are very few inexpensive ways to get soil for gardening. Using the soil that comes with your home is likely not the right consistency for growing vegetable or flower seeds, or you may not have a yard at all. If you live around Tacoma, the city sells sanitized biosolid soil called TAGRO for low prices (or free if you are at a community garden). You can get as much or as little as you need, and I can attest that it is safe and grows your plants the same as any compost. Otherwise you will need to head to the garden supply section of your local grocery or home improvement store. Miraclegro brand has been shown in scientific studies to grow plants bigger and faster than other soils, but it's also more expensive. When buying soil, have a plan in mind for what you are going to use it for, and pay attention to whether it is for indoor or outdoor use, if it has fertilizer already in it, or if it is specialized for certain types of plants.