

Springtime Learn and Play

Friendship Fort

Overview: Having a special place to hang out with friends is a great addition to a garden or green space. Pole beans are wonderful climbing vines that grow vigorously up any trellis throughout late spring and summer to create a leafy green “friendship fort.”

Materials:

- Pole bean seeds
- Six to eight 8’ lengths of bamboo (or substitute stakes)
- Twine

Instructions:

1. Select a location in full sun with moist, well-drained soil.
2. Choose a "pole bean" variety; these are vigorous growers that will twine their vines around a support. Avoid "bush bean" varieties because they remain short and shrubby.
3. Lash together the ends of six to eight 8’ lengths of bamboo. If you do not have bamboo available, you could use fallen limbs or any other type of long stake. Stand them upright, spreading the ends of the bamboo pieces to create a cone-shaped fort that’s about 5’ in diameter at the base. Push the bamboo pieces into the ground for stability.
4. Clear the weeds, grass, and rocks from the soil in a 12” wide path around the bamboo pieces to create the planting area. Loosen the soil to a depth of at least 8", and add some compost or slow-release fertilizer.
5. Plant 2–3 pole bean seeds at the base of each piece of bamboo, leaving a section unplanted as a door.
6. Gently water the seeds at planting time. Have kids check the soil moisture every day, and water as needed to keep the soil moist, especially while the plants are young. (Once the plants are older, they will grow deep roots and be able to handle drier conditions.) Kids can begin enjoying their new bean fort immediately after construction, just explain that they need to watch out for their baby plants as they begin emerging from the soil.
7. Once the plants have a few sets of leaves, gently place mulch around them to help keep the weeds and grass from growing back. You may also need to cut the grass or pull weeds from inside the fort, at least until the bean plants grow tall enough to shade it.



Fun with Mud!

Have some squishy, squashy fun while you explore soil with all of your senses by making a [mud pie](#) and decorating it with lots of nature treasures, painting with different colors of soil and creating [mud art](#), or exploring what makes up the soil beneath your feed with a [mud shake](#).



Springtime Scavenger Hunt

Overview: A scavenger hunt can be a fun way to encourage young gardeners to practice using their observation skills while also increasing their knowledge and awareness of seasonal plants, animals and elements.

Materials:

- List of things to find applicable to your area, or printed Springtime Scavenger Hunt Worksheet
- Clipboards (pieces of cardboard and thick rubber bands are a great alternative)
- Writing instruments (markers, crayons, pens, or pencils)
- Magnifying glasses (optional)

Instructions:

Discuss the seasons with children and brainstorm all the signs of spring in your area before your hunt. Create a list of common springtime plants, animals and elements in your local garden or green space, or use the provided worksheet.

Head outside to your chosen springtime hunt location and give each child a scavenger hunt sheet on a clipboard and a writing instrument, then encourage them to look closely and carefully for all the items on the list.



Tips: If working with children for whom clipboards are difficult to handle, consider making a large poster of your scavenger hunt items and marking off or tallying your finds as a group. Remind children that flowers provide food for animals and turn into fruits and seeds, so they're best left on plants. Pre-scouting your green space for trash/hazardous materials and explaining before hand that not finding everything on the list is okay are great ways to set up your scavenger hunt for success.

Additional Resources:

For information on how gardening activities align with Head Start Program Performance Standards and the Early Learning Outcomes Framework, download the National Farm to School Network's excellent resource - Growing Head Start Success with Farm to Early Care and Education available at:

<http://www.farmtoschool.org/resources-main/growing-head-start-success-with-farm-to-early-care-and-education>

More gardening resources for early childhood educators are available at <https://kidsgardening.org/ece-resources/>

Springtime Scavenger Hunt

Mark the box of each springtime item that you find! Turn your hunt into springtime bingo by seeing who can find every item in a column, row, or diagonal first.

