



SUMMER | Plants

Pruning: Putting our Plants in their Place

Summary:

Is all plant growth, good growth? We want our plants to grow and thrive but sometimes we have to cut plants back, or prune them, in order to encourage even more growth.

Before Visiting the Garden:

Gather: Pruning sheers (or scissors if sheers are unavailable) and gardening gloves

Explore: Graft by Roxy Paine: What do you see? Does this tree look like any other trees you have seen?

Read: *Weed, Water, and Wait* by Edith Hope Pine and Angela Halpin, Illustrated by Colleen M. Madden

In the Garden:

Now that our little seedlings have sprouted and are working hard to become big tall plants, we have to help them by doing a little pruning, or selectively cutting away certain leaves and buds. In much the same way that we have a hard time getting anything done when we're concentrating on too many things, plants have a hard time producing big, juicy produce when they're spreading their energy between too many different leaves and buds.

Think of today as cleaning day. We're going to remove the clutter we find in our room, the garden, and make space for red (or yellow or purple) ripe tomatoes to flourish!

Questions to Explore:

- What type of tomato plant do we have? Determinate (grows like a bush) or Indeterminate (grows up like a vine on a trellis)
- How many buds do you see? They might just be flowers at this point.
- Do you see any leaves that look like they might drain energy from our plant? Hint: look for leaves called suckers that like to grow in the elbows between the main plant stalk and its branches.
- Are there any other leaves that seem out of place? One clue might be color. Yellow leaves are still taking energy but they won't produce any fruit.

Activity:

Our garden survey is complete, but, first things first--pruning sheers are sharp! They need to be treated like scissors, no running or roughhousing when you are holding the sheers. Secondly, look twice, ask questions, and cut just once. Pruning is necessary but if we get too aggressive instead of encouraging new growth, we won't get any growth.

1. Start by removing any of the suckers you identify. Try to cut only the leaves you're removing, plants, like people, have gentle skin and too many nicks and cuts to their stems can cause disease or bruising.
2. Next, remove any yellowing leaves. Be sure to make your cuts as close to the branch or stem as possible so you remove all of the old growth. If you are growing an indeterminate variety of tomato, talk to an experienced gardener and find out if they recommend any additional pruning after they have been staked. Determinate varieties may not need additional pruning.

Beyond the Garden | Pruning + Paying It Forward

Like a garden, our rooms can get a little "overgrown" with old toys and treasures. Make a goal of filling one paper bag of things in your room that you no longer use or clothes that no longer fit. Donate your bag to a local, non-profit thrift store and give your old stuff new life. Enjoy your well pruned room!

Continue Exploring | Supporting Materials

Fun tomato facts: <http://www.ngkids.co.uk/science-and-nature/Ten-Top-Tomato-Facts>

Search here for kid friendly tomato recipes: <http://www.chopchopmag.org>