



SUMMER | Plants Weeds: Friend or Foe?

Summary:

Sometimes, our gardens can get crowded. Not with people but with plants! At first glance, this might seem like a good thing but are all plants helpful?

Before Visiting the Garden:

Gather: A magnifying glass, ruler, pencil, paper, and shovel

Explore: *Weeds II* by Joan Mitchell: Why do you think the artist called this picture weeds? What colors do you think represent weeds? Why?

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

In the Garden:

Today, we're going to get low to check out the soil in and around our plants. Good soil is essential for our plants, but it can also attract some other plants—the kind that won't turn into veggies or beautiful flowers. These pesky plants are called weeds. Some weeds can be lovely to look at, but unfortunately, all weeds take nutrients out of the soil. We want these nutrients to go into the plants we are tending!

In addition to taking nutrients from the soil, weeds also take up space. Our plants need space for their roots to be able to stretch and strengthen.

- Become a weed. Wrap your little gardener in a hug then ask him/her to stretch out their roots (arms and legs). Was it easy or hard to stretch out? Maybe they could get an arm or leg free but that pesky weed really inhibits their ability to grow.

Questions to Explore:

- Where are the weeds? Start at a plant that you planted and look around the base—is anything growing that shouldn't be?
- What do the weeds look like?
- Are they hard to distinguish from your plants? (by summer most plants are well established but weeds can be shorter and underdeveloped making them easier to spot)
- What areas of the garden seem to attract the most weeds? Why do think that is?

Activity:

1. Grab your shovel and start gently digging up the weeds you find. Be sure to dig down and around the weed so you get all the roots removed. Weeds are hardy and pervasive for a reason; they're great at growing! So, we have to match their energy to grow with our energy to remove.
2. Once you have finished weeding, collect your weeds into a pile. Spend some time measuring and documenting them.
3. How long was the longest weed? How many did you pull up? What was the shortest weed? Create some graphs together, plotting the heights and amounts of weeds you found.

Beyond the Garden | Homemade Mulch

One simple way to control weeds in the garden is by putting mulch around the roots. There are several different ways of mulching: bark, straw, leaf compost, newspaper, etc. The type of mulch you use will depend on the climate, soil type, and season in your garden. Check with your garden coordinator and see if you can create a plan together for mulching parts of the garden.

Continue Exploring | Supporting Materials

Trying to identify that weed? Check here: <http://www.garden.org/weedlibrary/>