



Growing units for teachers

Unit 5: Salads and herbs

Time of
year?



May

Overview

On the school plot, salads and herbs are your best friends – easy crops that can be harvested for much of the year. We group them together in this unit because they share many characteristics and uses, both on the plot and in the kitchen. Herbs tend to have a stronger flavour, so are used more sparingly.

Salads and herbs are a mind-bogglingly diverse group of leafy plants. How many different types of leaves and herbs can you mix up in a salad? Exactly – the possibilities are pretty much endless.

This unit celebrates their diversity and versatility. The children learn about the many different salad leaves, from freckled lettuces to spicy, purple-leaved mustards. They come to realise that those puffy pillows of salad sold by supermarkets are a pale imitation of what you can grow.

Get the children to investigate the difference in culinary uses between 'soft' herbs, such as mint or coriander, and the more robust 'woody' herbs, such as sage, rosemary and thyme.

Learning intentions

- ★ To explore the wide variety of salads and herbs.
- ★ To know how to harvest and use salads and herbs.

Before the sessions

★ Get clued-up and inspired by the range of salads you can grow. Two key books on the subject are: **The Organic Salad Garden** by Joy Larkcom and **Salad Leaves for All Seasons** by Charles Dowding. With a bit of practice, you can harvest salads deep into winter. See Growing unit 8, **Back to the plot** for more info on varieties suitable for winter growing.

★ Invest in some of the less familiar herbs. Lemon verbena, for example, is a brilliant plant – rub the leaves to release a divine lemony fragrance. Sorrel is tart and addictive – don't let the children eat more than a few sorrel leaves, though, as they contain low levels of an acid that is not healthy in very large quantities. Chocolate mint is another winner, with a proper chocolaty scent reminiscent of After Eights (remember them?). Children love chives, too, so make sure you reserve a spot for them on your plot.

★ Not all children love salad – at first, anyway. In our experience, you usually find a wilful few in any group. Don't make a fuss or force the issue – just make a mental note so that you can subtly try again later. We always urge the children to give new foods a try, but stress that it doesn't matter if they discover that they don't like it. Peer pressure is useful too. Sometimes a few key children wield influence. Convert them, and others are likely to follow.

★ Cross-reference relevant resources from the resource hub:

Relevant recipes: **Simple green salad with French dressing**
Jam jar dressings
Wilted spinach with garlic and nutmeg

Lessons: **How to make interesting salads**

Fruit and veg fact sheets: **Lettuce**
Spinach
Kale

All about fact sheets: **Herbs**

Unit 5 continued:

Salads and herbs

Activity ideas for children

- ★ Explore a variety of different salad leaves, either from the plot or bought in. Taste, count the different varieties, compare and contrast, generate descriptive vocabulary.
- ★ Repeat with herbs. 'What's the difference between salads and herbs?' Establish that herbs tend to be more strongly flavoured. Rub them between fingers to smell the scent. Make up a salad using a mix of both salad leaves and soft herbs, making an explicit learning point that you are leaving the 'woody' herbs such as thyme, sage and rosemary to one side, as these are too intense in flavour and best for cooking.
Useful resources: wide variety of different salad leaves and herbs; salad bowl.
- ★ Model the key skills of harvesting salad leaves so that the children can pick more leaves to add to the salad bowl. With many salad crops, for example, you can 'cut and come again'. In practice, this means you tug or cut away only the larger outer leaves so that the plant can re-grow for subsequent harvests. For more detail, check out the advice from the RHS:
www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=618
- ★ Sow a wide range of salads, both into plug trays or containers for planting out and also directly into the soil. Another useful technique is sowing mixtures of salad seed into trays such as recycled blue mushroom trays, lined and filled with compost.
Useful resources: seeds; seed compost; plug trays/seed trays/mushroom trays.
- ★ Encourage the children to use all of their senses to explore and compare different types of herbs. Rub the leaves of rosemary, thyme or sage then smell your fingers. Combine different herbs and describe the effect. Practise different herb harvesting techniques: picking only the outer leaves of a plant; snipping chives with scissors around 4cm above soil level; cutting off a stem of thyme then using thumb and forefinger to strip the leaves; pinching out the growing tips of basil to keep the plant bushy.
Useful resources: scissors.
- ★ Explore the world of edible weeds. 'What is a weed?' 'It is a plant growing in the wrong place and some are edible, too.' Look for and identify common weeds on the plot. Try nibbling plants such as chickweed and Good King Henry, if on hand.
- ★ Start to sell the mixed salad you grow. This is an excellent product on which to base any enterprise projects, or you could offer it to your school chef so they can jazz up the salad bar.
- ★ Finish the session by sharing the bowl of salad you've just made, perhaps mixing up a simple dressing for the leaves. See **How to behave in the kitchen and how to taste**.
Useful resources: salad bowl; ingredients for salad dressings.

Key vocabulary

- ★ Salad leaves
- ★ Woody herbs
- ★ Cut and come again
- ★ Soft herbs
- ★ Harvest

Curriculum links

Science

Naming plants.

D&T

Learning to cook various dishes.

Unit 5 continued:

Salads and herbs

Curriculum links continued

Maths

Various calculations if selling salad.

Key concepts and skills - progression

	Key concepts	Key skills
Foundation Stage	To know that there is a wide range of salad leaves To know that herbs are stronger in scent and flavour than salads	To pick salad leaves and herbs without damaging the plant
Key Stage 1	To know and name a wide range of salad leaves, offering diverse flavours, colours and textures To understand the difference between 'soft' and 'woody' herbs	To use the correct technique to sow and harvest 'cut and come again' salad leaves
Key Stage 2	To know and name a wide range of salad leaves, offering diverse flavours, colours and textures To be able to name examples of 'soft' and 'woody' herbs	To use the correct technique to sow and harvest 'cut and come again' salad leaves To know how to harvest a variety of herbs

On your plot - extra ideas

- ★ Once the weather has warmed up, the children can sow the seed of more tender plants such as basil, beans, courgettes and squashes. Don't forget edible flowers, too, such as borage, nasturtiums and marigolds.
- ★ 'Prick out' seedlings of plants that need to be moved to bigger pots. Model how the children need to gently hold the seedlings by the leaves and use a teaspoon, plant label or similar to scoop out the root ball before firming into a small pot. Give it the 'tug test', gently pulling on the leaves to check that it is firmed in.
- ★ Take 'softwood cuttings' to grow on new plants. This is a technique for snipping off a small section of a plant that you then plant up in a different pot to grow on. These new plants can be sold to raise funds for the plot. This technique works well with a wide range of plants, such as lemon verbena, mint or lavender.
- ★ Keep on hunting for slugs and snails – collect them up before they get a chance to multiply and remove them from the plot.

Unit 5 continued:

Salads and herbs

On your plot - horticultural tips

- ★ You will need to keep 'earthing up' potatoes as they grow. This involves pushing more soil or compost over the emerging shoots to cover them up.
- ★ Keep an eye open for the build-up of pests on the plot. One of the most common is aphids, AKA greenfly or blackfly. The RHS has more information on controlling aphids:
www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=181
- ★ If you aim to grow courgettes and squashes, prepare the soil first by digging a planting hole, then mixing in plenty of nutrient-rich organic matter, such as garden compost or worm casts.
- ★ Watch out for birds eating fruits such as strawberries or currants. If this is a problem, cover the plants with netting to deter them, fastening securely at ground level so that the birds cannot become trapped underneath.

Your notes...
