Starting a Garden

Primary Audience: Early Childhood

Video: Watch the video to see how the [COSI Rain Garden](url) was created in 2009. Then start your own garden!

Introduction: Very young children often need relationships and connections more than a bunch of activities. But add a stay-at-home order and a couple weeks in, and it can be difficult! We need activities that work well and can take up plenty of time – without going to a playground or a museum. So why not start a garden?

Dirt is one thing that young kids often love – and if they also love baths, this can be a win-win! Seeds are cheap and as we found can be re-planted many times in an afternoon. In Part 1, have kids plant seeds. If planting herbs and vegetables, they may plant some things they will never eat and others that they might just try! In Part 2, create grass heads to help talk about emotions and expressions. You may also be able to use the grass heads for activities in the future, like a grass hair salon! Finally, in Part 3, take advantage of the spring rain we’re getting to create a rain gauge.

Materials:
- Markers, including 1 permanent marker
- Soil
- Water
- Paper cups
- Seeds
- Spoons/Small Shovels
- Empty plastic bottle or cup
- Ruler

Part 1: Plant a Garden
1. You will use paper cups to plant your seeds. First, you can have kids decorate the cups and mark them to indicate what seed will be planted inside.
2. You may want to move outside to do the rest of this activity. Use spoons or small hand shovels to add dirt to the cups.
3. Plant your seeds into the cups. Try whatever kinds you like.* Work together to find the best spot for your plants to grow.
4. Later, when you harvest from your garden, have the kids help out with making the food!

*We planted basil (for “green pasta”), radishes and lettuce (because they sprout quickly), and beans (because the kids will sometimes eat them). We started early Saturday morning with our planting and on Monday we already saw some seedlings starting to grow!
Part 2: Plant Grass Heads
1. Allow everyone to color their own paper cups by drawing a face on the cup.
   Adults: be sure make a few cups with faces showing different emotions.
2. Ask the kids what they think each face’s emotion looks like.
3. Repeat steps 2 and 3 above with grass seeds.

Part 3: Make a Rain Gauge
When it rains, how do you know how much it rained? We often check the weather and they may tell us 1, 2, or more inches. Is there a way to measure for yourself how much it rained? Try building a simple rain gauge!

1. Find an empty, cleaned out plastic container to use for your rain gauge. Ideally, the opening will be the same size as the base.
2. Using a ruler and a permanent marker, mark 1" increments along the container, starting at the bottom.
3. Set your rain gauge out on a day or night that it is raining. Record the time you set out the container and decide how long you want it to set out before you check again. How many inches do you think it will rain in that amount of time?
4. At the determined time, check your rain gauge! How much did it rain? Did the number surprise you, or was it close to your guess?
5. Optional: use a larger container to collect rainwater and then save that water for watering your plants on a hot day! Just be sure that if you store the water, you keep it in a closed container and use it soon. Mosquitos tend to lay their eggs in standing water.

Additional Resources: Reach out to the COSI Department of Science Content if you have any questions or comments – or if you would like to share a photo of your garden!