



Garden Planning Checklist

Site Assessment

- ☐ Measure garden area (length × width)
- ☐ Track sunlight - Note hours of sun in different spots
- ☐ Find your USDA Hardiness Zone (search online with your zip code)
- ☐ Locate water sources - Mark nearest hose/spigot
- ☐ Note existing features - Trees, fences, slopes, buildings

Soil Planning

- ☐ Test soil - pH and nutrients (local extension office or home kit)
- ☐ Plan compost location - Away from house, accessible year-round
- ☐ Choose mulch type - Straw, leaves, wood chips, or grass clippings
- ☐ Schedule soil amendments - Spring and fall compost additions
- ☐ Mark no-dig areas - Plan to minimize soil disturbance

Plant Selection

Food Plants

- ☐ List what you currently eat as well as your dream food list which may include items that are expensive to buy or hard to find in your area.
- ☐ Consider what plants you could plant as a 'guild' as well as non-edible companion plants.
- ☐ Plan perennial edibles - Asparagus, fruit trees, herbs

Flowers & Ornamentals

- ☐ Choose native plants - Adapted to your climate
- ☐ Plan bloom times - Something flowering spring through fall
- ☐ Group by water needs - High, medium, low water zones
- ☐ Consider wildlife value - Plants that feed birds and pollinators



Water Planning

- ☐ Create water zones - Group plants with similar water needs
- ☐ Plan irrigation method - Soaker hoses, drip systems, or hand watering
- ☐ Install rain collection - Barrels or cisterns for roof runoff
- ☐ Reduce lawn area - Replace with low-water plants where possible
- ☐ Plan mulching - 2-4 inches around all plants

Pest & Disease Prevention

- ☐ Plan crop rotation - Different plant families in different spots each year
- ☐ Choose disease-resistant varieties - Check seed catalogs
- ☐ Plan beneficial insect plants - Flowers that attract good bugs
- ☐ Plan proper spacing - Allow air circulation between plants
- ☐ Plan cleanup schedule - Weekly garden inspections

Seasonal Timeline

Spring (March-May)

- ☐ Start cool-weather crops - Peas, lettuce, spinach
- ☐ Prepare beds - Add compost, remove weeds
- ☐ Start seeds indoors - Tomatoes, peppers (8-10 weeks before last frost)

Summer (June-August)

- ☐ Plant warm-weather crops - After last frost date
- ☐ Plan succession planting – Seed new lettuce every 2 weeks
- ☐ Plan extra watering - Deep, infrequent during hot weather

Fall (September-November)

- ☐ Plant spring bulbs - Before ground freezes
- ☐ Start cover crops - Where beds will be empty
- ☐ Plan winter protection - Row covers, mulch for tender plants
- ☐ If you have a greenhouse – Plant your winter crop



Winter (December-February)

- ☐ Plan next year - Order seeds, design changes
- ☐ Maintain tools - Clean, sharpen, oil
- ☐ Protect plants - Check winter covers after storms

Layout Planning

- ☐ Draw property layout AND
 - Mark sun/shade areas - Based on your light observations
 - Plan pathways - 2-3 feet wide for easy access
 - Place tall plants/trees to create shade and/or wind buffers
 - Plan support structures - Trellises for vines, cages for tomatoes
- ☐ Draw detailed garden maps for each area - Simple sketch with measurements

Resource Planning

- ☐ Set budget - Seeds, plants, tools, soil amendments
- ☐ Plan compost sources - Kitchen scraps, yard waste, manure
- ☐ Tool inventory - What you have vs. what you need
- ☐ Plan help needed - Heavy lifting, expertise, seasonal labor
- ☐ Research local resources - Extension office, garden clubs, nurseries

Final Planning Checklist

- ☐ Start small - Plan manageable area(s) if it is your first year
- ☐ Check items on this list that you will commit to in **one color!** Then, in another color:
- ☐ Plan for expansion - How your garden might grow in future years
- ☐ Set realistic goals - Match plans to available time and energy
- ☐ Plan record keeping - Planting dates, varieties, what worked
- ☐ **Plan enjoyment - Seating area, paths, favorite plants**



Emergency Planning

- Plan frost protection - Row covers, blankets, location of tender plants
- Plan drought backup - Extra water storage, drought-tolerant backup plants
- Plan pest response - Organic spray ingredients, beneficial insect sources
- Plan storm protection - Securing tall plants, drainage for heavy rain

Keep this checklist handy during planning season. Review each item as you complete them. A well-planned garden is a successful garden!



Family Learning Tip:

A thoughtfully designed and executed growing season offers an excellent opportunity to cultivate diverse abilities that extend far beyond the garden. This extended, practical endeavor naturally develops both concrete gardening knowledge and broader life skills, covering everything from understanding natural processes to building personal determination and adaptability. It's essentially a long-term, hands-on project that teaches everything from scientific principles to personal resilience. Check out **two versions** of how to view these opportunities from a learning outcomes point of view and from a formal educational point of view (rubric of hard and soft skills):

Here is a 'soft skills first' list of possible learning outcomes:

Soft Skills (Interpersonal & Personal Qualities)

These are the transferable skills that can be applied to almost any area of life or work.

- **Patience & Perseverance:** Gardening is not an instant process. It teaches the value of long-term commitment and the ability to persist through setbacks like crop failure, bad weather, or pests.
- **Problem-Solving:** Every garden faces unexpected challenges. This requires creative and critical thinking to diagnose issues, research solutions, and adapt to changing conditions.
- **Responsibility & Accountability:** The health of the garden is directly tied to the care it receives. This teaches a sense of ownership and accountability for one's actions and decisions.



- **Adaptability & Flexibility:** A carefully made plan can be ruined by an unexpected cold snap or a heat wave. Gardeners learn to be flexible and adapt their plans in response to unpredictable environmental factors.
- **Time Management:** Successfully maintaining a garden requires regular attention. This teaches how to prioritize tasks and balance them with other commitments.
- **Communication & Collaboration:** If gardening with others, it requires clear communication, the ability to delegate tasks, and conflict resolution to work towards a shared goal.
- **Stress Management:** For many, gardening is a form of active mindfulness. The physical work and connection to nature can be a highly effective way to reduce stress and improve mental well-being.

Hard Skills (Technical & Measurable)

These are the specific, teachable abilities that are directly related to the task of gardening.

- **Project Management:** A garden season requires a full project lifecycle:
 - **Planning & Scheduling:** Creating a planting schedule, mapping out the garden layout, and determining what tasks need to be done and when.
 - **Resource Management:** Budgeting for seeds, soil, and tools; managing water usage; and optimizing the use of space.
 - **Execution:** Implementing the plan by preparing soil, planting seeds, and maintaining the garden.
- **Horticulture & Plant Science:**
 - **Plant Biology:** Understanding plant life cycles, identifying different species, and knowing their specific needs (sun, water, nutrients).
 - **Soil Science:** Analyzing soil composition, amending it with compost or fertilizers, and understanding its role in plant health.
 - **Pest and Disease Management:** Identifying common pests and diseases, and applying appropriate, often organic, methods for control and prevention.
- **Data Analysis & Observation:**
 - **Record-Keeping:** Documenting planting dates, growth rates, pest issues, and harvest yields.
 - **Problem Diagnosis:** Using observation to identify issues like nutrient deficiencies or overwatering and troubleshooting the problem.
- **Manual & Mechanical Skills:**



- Tool Proficiency: Correctly and safely using a wide range of hand tools (shovels, trowels, pruners) and potentially larger equipment (tillers, mowers).
- Construction: Building raised beds, trellises, or simple irrigation systems.

➤ **Water Management:**

- Irrigation Techniques: Implementing and maintaining systems like drip irrigation or sprinklers to conserve water.
- Water Conservation: Understanding how to water effectively to promote deep root growth and reduce waste.

Garden Activity – Skills Rubric – for the educators out there!

Garden Activity / Lesson	Hard (Technical) Skills	Soft (Transferable) Skills
Site Assessment & Bed Layout Design	Sun/wind mapping, measuring, layout planning, companion & succession planting	Critical/system thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity
Soil Testing & Amendment	Soil texture/pH/nutrient testing, composting, mulch application	Observation, data logging, problem-solving, teamwork
Seed Starting & Plant Propagation	Germination, potting media, transplanting, labeling	Responsibility, patience, attention to detail
Tool & Infrastructure Setup	Tool safety, basic carpentry	Teamwork, communication, leadership, safety awareness
Irrigation Setup & Management	Drip/soaker systems, timers, water conservation	Planning, responsibility, problem-solving
IPM Walk (Pest & Disease Scouting)	Pest/disease ID, thresholds, beneficial insect control	Critical thinking, systems thinking, resilience
Planting & Spacing	Accurate spacing, density calculations	Planning, communication, collaboration



Garden Activity / Lesson	Hard (Technical) Skills	Soft (Transferable) Skills
Observation & Journaling	Phenology tracking, pest/plant reporting	Attention to detail, observation, reflective thinking
Harvesting & Postharvest Handling	Maturity indices, harvesting methods, basic storage	Quality focus, time management, teamwork
Garden-to-Table Activity	Food safety, simple cooking/prep, preservation	Self-efficacy, confidence, health awareness, collaboration
Digital Planning / Data Recording	Spreadsheets, apps, sensors for monitoring	Organization, tech comfort, forward planning
Reflection / Presentation	Data summary, yield evaluation, reporting	Communication, peer teaching, self-assessment, confidence