

Exploring Herbs

Objectives

Students will!

Use their senses to explore the sight, smell, touch and taste of the herbs growing in the garden.

Educator Notes

This activity should be done once the herb plants have had time to grow and mature, starting in mid to late summer and continuing through the fall. The herbs planted in the teaching garden for the 2011 growing season are: basil, chives, rosemary, spearmint and thyme.

If chosen to make one of the recipes from the extension section, but there are not enough herbs for your recipe ready for harvest in the garden, you may supplement with fresh herbs bought from the store or market; however, be sure to use at least some herbs from garden to make a point of connection between that which the young gardeners have grown and that which they will eat!

Materials

A few sprigs of each herb grown in the garden

Blindfolds (optional)

Preparation

All you need for this activity are a few samples of the herbs themselves to pass around, prepared before the lesson begins. You may also want to use blindfolds for the “To See Without Seeing” activity. Gauge your students before hand to determine whether the blindfolds will or will not be effective.

Key Vocabulary

Herb

Senses

Smell

Touch

taste

Activity

To See Without Seeing:

Have students sit in a circle and explain that, today, they will be exploring herbs. Herbs are

plants whose leaves and stems have a strong taste and/or smell; they are used to flavor food or drink, and some are even used as medicine for their healing powers. Explain that there are a few different herbs growing in our garden here at John Hope and that we'll be exploring their sight, touch, smell and taste. Ask students to close their eyes (alternatively, you may blindfold them). Pass around sprigs of each herb one by one. Have them describe the herbs, prompt them with questions. How does this herb smell? Rub the leaves, smell again. Take a nibble—how does it taste? Does it remind them of any foods they know? How does the herb feel against the skin? Smooth? Rough? Furry? Imagine how it would feel as medicine—do you think it would lift your mood? Help with a cold? Etc. Then they can open their eyes and meet the herbs and learn a little information about them.

Herb Scavenger Hunt:

Now ask the students to try and find where each herb is in the garden. You may want to give each student a sprig from the previous activity as reference for their scavenger hunt.

Wrap-Up

Ask students if they have a favorite herb from the garden after this activity. Does it smell good? Taste good? Feel good? What makes an herb different from a fruit or vegetable? Herbs are used in relatively small quantities because their tastes and scents are so strong! Eating mint probably won't make you full, but it will certainly make whatever you're eating super minty and yummy.

Extension Activity (K-5)

The following extension activities are delicious recipes for food and drink using mint. The Melon Mint Smoothie can be made fairly quickly, while the Sun Mint Tea and Mint Ice Cream in a Bag require more active and inactive time.

Sun Mint Tea

This tea is best made on a particularly sunny day. Once tea is made, you can drink it warm, let it cool in the fridge or enjoy it with a few cubes of ice.

Four big handfuls of fresh mint, washed and torn/crushed (harvested from garden with students or brought from elsewhere)

Four cups of water

A few tablespoons of honey

A few thin slices of lemon or lime (optional)

Water heater or kettle to speed up steeping process

Glass quart jar with lid

Strainer

Measuring utensils

Cups for drinking tea

1. Place mint, honey and a few slices of lemon or lime (if using) into glass quart jar.
2. Heat four cups of water on the stove or in a water heater (water does not need to be boiling) and pour over mint.
3. Seal the jar's lid, give the jar a good shake and set outside in the sun for an hour or so. Alternatively, you could use unheated water and let the jar sit in the sun for 3-6 hours.
4. Once tea has steeped long enough, strain out mint and lemon slices. Let cool in fridge or enjoy right away!

Melon Mint Smoothie

Two cups of melon, roughly chopped (harvested from garden with students or brought from elsewhere)

Juice of one lime

Honey (about one teaspoon)

A handful of fresh mint leaves, washed and torn/crushed (harvested from garden with students)

Blender

Knife and cutting board for melon

Cups for drinking smoothie

1. Dump all ingredients into a blender and blend until smooth!
2. That was easy! enjoy!

Mint Ice Cream in a Bag

One cup heavy cream

Two cups whole milk

" cup sugar

Two cups of packed mint leaves, washed (harvested from garden with students or brought from elsewhere)

Pinch of salt

Stove & medium saucepan

Strainer

Medium-sized bowl

Measuring utensils

Fridge

6 x 6 (36) tablespoons rock salt

6 pint-sized plastic Ziploc bags

6 gallon-sized plastic Ziploc bags

Enough ice cubs to fill 6 gallon-sized plastic Ziploc bags halfway

Bowls and spoons for eating the ice cream

1. In a medium saucepan, warm the milk, sugar, salt and mint.
2. Once the mixture is hot and steaming, remove from the heat, cover, and let stand for an hour to infuse the mint flavor.
3. Pour mint-milk mixture through a strainer into the medium-sized bowl, then press down with well washed hands to make sure that as much liquid as possible has been squeezed out of the mint. Discard or munch on the mint (it will be creamy and sweet!)

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4. Stir in the heavy cream and allow mixture to cool down and chill in a fridge for at least a few hours (or overnight).
5. When ready to make the ice cream, fill the six large bags half full of ice and add 6 tablespoons of rock salt per bag.
6. Put 1/2 cup of chilled ice cream base into each of the pint-sized bags, seal well and place each into a larger ice-filled Ziploc.
7. Seal the large bags and shake shake shake until the mixture is ice cream. This should take about five minutes!
8. Pull each of the smaller bags out of the larger ones, wipe off the top of the small bags, open them carefully and enjoy fresh mint ice cream!

Sources

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