Fall After School Garden Program

***Week 1: Green Beginnings: An Introduction to Gardening and its Role in Healthy Living***

Week 1 introduces students to the foundational concepts of gardening and its influence on healthy living. Students will delve into the multifaceted world of gardening, understand the myriad benefits plants bring to our health, and discover the role of gardening in promoting a balanced diet. Activities span from interactive discussions and engaging videos to hands-on garden journaling. The week wraps up with a site assessment, offering students a tangible connection to their immediate environment and potential gardening spots at school.

***Week 2: Foundations of Plant Growth: From Seed to Nutrition***

In Week 2, students delve deep into the intricacies of plant growth, starting from the foundational concept of seeds and their varieties, to the science behind plant life cycles, and the differences between annuals, biennials, and perennials. The program elaborates on different seed-starting methods, guiding participants on how to emulate the perfect conditions for germination. Furthermore, students will explore the diverse plant families common in gardens, understanding their unique characteristics and shared traits. Root systems, vital to plant health and growth, are studied in detail, highlighting their evolutionary advantages and functions. Lastly, the week culminates in a comprehensive overview of plant nutrition, emphasizing the significance of essential nutrients, and guiding students on the optimal use of organic and synthetic fertilizers for peak plant vitality and yield.

***Week 3: Gardening Essentials: From Sunlight to Systems***

In Week 3, participants will dive deep into the foundational aspects of gardening. They will explore various watering and irrigation methods, highlighting the importance of choosing the right technique for optimal plant health and efficiency. Alongside this, the program delves into the essential tools required for gardening, from hand trowels to wheelbarrows, ensuring that participants are well-equipped for their gardening journey. A comprehensive breakdown of different soil types will be covered, enabling gardeners to understand their garden's soil profile and how it impacts plant growth. The program also introduces urban farming systems like container gardens, raised beds, and passive hydroponic systems, showcasing innovative ways to maximize yield in limited spaces. Finally, the critical role of light in plant growth will be examined, emphasizing the importance of the correct light intensity and spectrum for various plants.

***Week 4: Garden Detectives: Diagnosing Plants & Managing Challenges***

During this week, participants will delve into the intricate world of plant care and diagnostics. They'll explore common pests found in Indiana, from aphids to flea beetles, understanding their appearance, damage caused, and recognition tips. The session will also cover prevalent plant diseases, revealing how they manifest and their effects on plants. Nutrient deficiencies, a crucial aspect of plant health, will be discussed in detail, equipping attendees with knowledge about symptoms and management techniques. Moreover, the importance of active observation in gardening will be emphasized, offering strategies to monitor growth patterns, leaf health, and environmental factors. Participants will be armed with a comprehensive toolkit, ensuring they can identify and combat various challenges in their gardens.

***Week 5: Real-World Farms and Gardens***

Week 5 students will either participate in a scheduled fieldtrip to a farm or listen to a local farmer involved in the community sharing their experiences. The goal is to provide students the opportunity to interact with real world examples of farms and gardens at scale.

***Week 6: Garden's Journey: Harvest, Renew, and Prepare for Next Season***

This concluding week focuses on the full circle of gardening—harvesting, rejuvenation, and preparation for the next planting cycle. Students will delve into the art and significance of seed saving, understanding its crucial role in preserving biodiversity and cultural heritage. They'll get hands-on experience with harvesting practices, ensuring they gather the produce at its peak while maintaining the garden's health. The importance of composting is also covered, emphasizing the recycling of nutrients back into the soil. To celebrate their journey, students will actively participate in two activities: harvesting hydroponic lettuce and microgreens for a fresh salad tasting, followed by a collective sharing of their garden journals, reflecting on their growth and learning throughout the program.