

## Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project

### Literacy Beds

I stole this idea from a school in Alexandria, Virginia...creating a garden bed based on the information in a certain piece of children's literature (they used Beatrix Potter's *Peter Rabbit*). Of course this is only limited by yours and your children's imaginations but the basics are to include as many of the props that figure prominently in the book and since it's a garden, to grow everything mentioned in the book. My take on this, being a gardener, is that in Storybook Land, they don't have to quite get the facts straight about horticulture and so I improvise. If the book includes growing veggies that don't actually grow at the same time (peas and corn, for instance) then I recommend planting whatever is supposed to be planted when you are doing this and providing a substitute for the other. The substitute could be as fancy as a plywood-painted piece of corn or a child's drawing laminated (it should withstand the weather). You can also have a child color a picture of the cover of the book, so that everyone in your school knows what you are doing.

What? You don't have any gardening experience? Super! You actually get to model learning for your students instead of just pretending to learn to learn! Resources for learning about gardening (people always come to mind first): parents or grandparents (latter more likely), a local farmer (look in the ASAP Local Food Guide or online at [www.BuyAppalachian.org](http://www.BuyAppalachian.org)), Cooperative Extension, or maybe one of your students!

So, there you have it! Sound easy? Well, here are some pieces of literature (in no particular order) that you might consider and what you might do with each of them:

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*Tops and Bottoms* by Janet Stevens – talk about a lesson of parts of the foods we eat (roots, stems, leaves) and a lesson on trickster tales to boot! Props might include an Adirondack chair and foot stool, aluminum lawn chairs and a wooden vegetable sign. The bear and rabbits are also props (done in plywood, or stuffed animals) and the bear wears men's shoes and a tie with bees on it and the rabbits wear a hat and shirts with veggies (carrots) on it. Following the book, you would plant: carrots, radishes, beets, lettuce, broccoli, celery, corn. Kids think this book is such fun so it should be a popular one to do!

*The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss – a lesson on recycling...you could plant a thneed garden (remember, thneeds are things you don't need)...plant seeds and transplants (anything you want, but please include veggies (easy lesson for nutrition)) in old rusty buckets, old shoes, in anything you might salvage! These items could easily be brought from home by your children. You could also build a strange tree that would be the Truffala Tree (lesson on extinction).

*Scarecrow* by Cynthia Rylant – hate to play favorites but this is the one! I usually start a gardening program with children (or adults for that matter) reading this book. You could do a choral reading with this book (have children select their favorite lines and then read them one after the other) to get the gentle, calm lesson across. Props could include: scarecrows (duh! But you could also send popsicle sticks home and have all your kids make teeny scarecrows), the main scarecrow should include all the important elements (pie pan hands, suit, button eyes, hat, worm living in lapel...it never fails that some kid will ask me what a lapel is). What you would grow: sunflowers, beans, pumpkins. You could also include the owls, rabbits, spiders, birds and worm mentioned. You could research all these things for projects! Find out the significance of why Rylant chose the birds she did (birds that no one cares much for, often considered pesky birds). You could write stories from the perspective of the scarecrow. Endless possibilities with a piece of literature this rich.

*How Groundhog's Garden Grew* by Lynne Cherry – what a romping garden you'd have if you planted everything in this book! You can really tell that gardens are a dear subject of Cherry's. This could be the nutrition project to beat all! Won't even go into all the things you would plant. Props could include: a squirrel, a groundhog, trellis, wren, praying mantis (buy these from a mail order and release in your garden!), seed markers, pictures of seed to seedling to plant (life cycle of plants), small compost bin (easy to make out of chicken wire)...this one could keep you busy! In the back of the book, Lynne Cherry writes a letter to the reader and gives contact info where the children can write to get more info on children's gardening fun. Again, endless!

*Growing Vegetable Soup* by Lois Ehlert – turn this into a author study as Ehlert also writes other books that you could include. Your props for this book would need to be, in my opinion, brightly painted to stay with the style of Ehlert. Props: shovel, rake, hoe, gloves, seed packs, watering can, bushel basket, basket, pail, soup pot, ladle, hand grubber, spading fork. Again, numerous things to plant.

I think you get the idea...other books to consider: *The Ugly Vegetables*, *Moonflower*, *Grandpa's Too Good Garden*, *Eddie's Garden* and *How to Make Things Grow*, *The Carrot Seed*, *Growing Colors* (these last two good for the littlest of kids), *Sunflower Sal* coupled with *Ten Seeds*...have fun!

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