

Garden-based learning can be a naturally inclusive mode of education because it tends to be learner-centered, interest-based, flexible, and collaborative. In fact, the positive impacts of garden-based learning, academically and otherwise, prove consistent regardless of student population, school, or program.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, garden-based education is not exempt from bias and it is important to be intentional about inclusive programming in this context. Students are far more capable of learning when they feel safe, seen, heard, that they matter, and that they belong! Here are some tips for building a culturally relevant garden education program, gleaned from the resources listed on this page. We welcome your feedback, and encourage you to keep exploring!

## **1. Get to know your students and their families well.**

- a. Consider negative and positive cultural connections to nature. Do not assume interest, family history, comfort level, or knowledge.
- b. Be learners together; value relationships and lived experiences. Ask students about their families, favorite foods, and familiarity with plants and animals. Give students ownership over garden planning.
- c. Involve families. Choose crops based on preferred foods, share recipes, and celebrate holidays and festivals important to families.

## **2. Create a strong class community.**

- a. Center play, exploration, curiosity, mindfulness, beauty, awe, and gratitude. Build time into your lessons for this. Make room just for digging, take wonder walks, build a sensory garden, do scavenger hunts, and share food.
- b. Prioritize connection over correction. Connect students to nature, themselves, and one another in addition to content and skills. Be ok with mess, mistakes, and distractions!
- c. Offer choice and flexibility in garden tasks based on interest and ability. Utilize stations.

## **3. Create many opportunities for purposeful interactions with community members.**

- a. Invite guest speakers or conduct interviews with community members such as local farmers, educators, activists, chefs, elders, and family members.
- b. Research local land and crop history and how it has changed over time. Integrate current events and issues into your curriculum.
- c. Volunteer at or take field trips to other gardens or farms in your area.

## **4. Practice intentional garden design.**

- a. Establish a sense of place. Create memorable structures and art that reflect and celebrate the local history, culture, landscape, and people.
- b. Design an accessible garden space for diverse abilities and ages. Include signage and labels in relevant languages.
- c. Explore non-linear garden design and practices like intercropping or companion planting. Cultivate biodiversity. Allow nature to serve as a co-teacher by reflecting local culture, diversity, mutually beneficial relationships, interconnectedness, and community.

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<sup>1</sup> Williams, Dilafruz. "Garden-Based Education" in the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*, February 2018.

# Culturally Inclusive Garden-Based Learning



## Affinity Group for POC in School Gardening

Life Lab and the School Garden Support Organization (SGSO) Network have teamed up to facilitate an affinity group for people of color in school gardening. This affinity group will function as a professional learning community where they will share information and dive into a different topic ranging from identifying strengths to combating bias at work. This group is open to people who identify as people of color. If you are interested in joining, fill out [this form!](#)

## Books

- *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*, Robin Wall Kimmerer
- *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students*, Zaretta Hammond
- *Farming While Black: Soul Fire Farm's Practical Guide to Liberation on the Land*, Leah Penniman
- *Learning Gardens and Sustainability Education: Bringing Life to Schools and Schools to Life*, Dilafroz Williams and Jonathan Brown
- *Nature Based Learning for Young Children: Anytime, Anywhere, on Any Budget*, Julie Powers and Sheila Williams Ridge
- *Rooted in the Earth: Reclaiming the African American Environmental Heritage*, Dianne Glave

## Organizations and Online Resources

- Avarna Group: [Instructor Bias Self-Assessment](#)
- Edible Schoolyard: [Culturally Relevant and Responsive Curriculum](#)
- Education Outside
  - [Building Culturally Responsive and Inclusive Outdoor Classrooms](#)
  - [Laying the Foundation for Discussing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Among Garden Educators](#)
  - [Getting to Know Yourself and Your Community: Identity Mapping, Fitting-in Vs. Belonging, Asset Mapping](#)
- Justice Outside: [Racial Equity in Outdoor Science and Environmental Education](#)
- Kids Gardening: [Using Garden Books as Windows and Mirrors](#)
- Learning for Justice: [Liberated Roots](#)
- Rethink Outside: [Abolitionist and Environmental Place-Based Education](#)
- SGSO Network
  - [Culturally Responsive Approaches](#)
  - [Strengthening Equity and Inclusion in Garden Education](#)

## Webinars

- Kids Gardening
  - [Applying Antiracism and Abolitionist Teaching in Garden-based Learning \(2022\)](#)
  - [Webinar Series: Culturally Inclusive Teaching in the Garden \(2023\)](#)
- SGSO Network
  - [Decolonizing Garden Education \(2023\)](#)
  - [Non-linear Garden Design as an Identity Affirming Practice \(2023\)](#)