

FRESH from the Garden

Latest Videos

As face-to-face learning challenges are met in many schools with COVID-19 restrictions, teachers are being encouraged to utilize outdoor learning spaces. This summer, Amy and Doug presented a virtual session at the National Children & Youth Garden Symposium. Their focus on Outdoor Learning Centers has become more relevant than ever expected. Check out these new videos and see how you might incorporate “centers” in your outdoor classroom.



- [Literacy Center](#)
- [Nature Building](#)
- [Weather Stations](#)
- [Measurement](#)
- [Digging Bed](#)



Harvesting Sweet Potatoes



It's time to don your eyepatch and your best pirate accent to dig for buried treasure in the garden! The sweet potatoes arrrrrgh ready (or almost ready) to harvest, matey.

Doug has some tips and tricks for [harvesting your sweet potatoes](#). Don't miss the special appearances by some of our local elementary school students as they have started harvesting their sweet potatoes!



Curing Sweet Potatoes

Now that you have harvested your sweet potatoes, you may be tempted to rush right into the kitchen and prepare them, but there's actually one more important step. Sweet potatoes need to be cured to reach their full sweetness. The process of curing allows the starches to convert to natural sugars and develop that yummy sweetness we associate with sweet potatoes. Curing also allows any scars from the harvest to heal and toughen up the skins to improve storage life. There's really no rush to use up your sweet potatoes, they can be stored for 6 months or more.



The first thing you will want to do after harvest is gently brush off any remaining soil, but do not wash them. The optimal conditions for curing sweet potatoes are a temperature of 85F, and 80-90% humidity with good ventilation for 4-14 days. These conditions are easily achieved in a greenhouse, but may be more difficult at home or school. Here are a few alternative curing methods that are suitable for small scale production.

1. Milk crate: Place a single layer of sweet potatoes on the bottom of a milk crate. Use wooden dowels or sticks through the holes in the sides of the crate to build a base for a second layer a few inches above the first. Place another layer of sweet potatoes on the sticks. Cover with a damp towel and place in a warm, dry, shady place outside or in a garage. This setup allows good airflow, and provides a moist warm environment.
2. Burlap bag: Place sweet potatoes in a single layer inside a burlap bag. Place a moist towel on top of the burlap bag and place in a warm, dry, shady place outside.
3. Plastic bag: Poke several holes in a plastic grocery bag. Place a single layer of sweet potatoes in the bag and tie shut. Place in a sunny window or warm, dry, shady place outside.

Once cured, sweet potatoes should be stored in a cool dry place with good ventilation.



Teacher Tip

Do you want to utilize outdoor space for teaching, but do not have a designated outdoor classroom? Consider creating "Go Bags." Each student has their own bag, eliminating the need for teachers to disinfect items between groups of students. Each tote bag or reusable grocery bag would contain the following items, many of which can be brought from home.

- Seat pad (stadium cushion, half a yoga mat, towel, carpet square, etc.)
- Clipboard/Notebook

- Sun hat
- Hand sanitizer
- Water bottle
- Pens/pencils

When it's time to head out, there's no gathering materials, each student just grabs their Go Bag. You can ensure they set up six feet apart and they have created a defined space to maintain their spacing. When it's time to come back inside, everything set out packs up and will be ready to go next time.



LIVE! From the Garden



Engaging families in a virtual learning environment has its own challenges as well. Here is one example of a virtual family event you might like to check out or it might inspire your own event.

On Tuesday, September 22, from 6-7 pm, Patriots STEM Elementary in Concord will be hosting their first ever "[Harvest Live](#)." STEM teachers and other staff, along with Amy

Bowman and Doug Vernon from NC State Plants for Human Health Institute, will be in the school garden to host a Microsoft Live broadcast for families. During the broadcast, the team will share all kinds of information about sweet potatoes. They will also begin harvesting and answer questions from families.

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