

Which herbs do we grow?



Use this chart to record the characteristics of the different herbs in your school grounds.

Draw the shape of the leaf	Describe its texture	Describe its colour	What does it smell like?	Which herb do you think it is?

out&about

School grounds focus:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to be?
- How can we get there?
- Making the changes
- Using your grounds

Curriculum focus:

- Science
- History
- Design and technology

Purpose of this activity:

- To show children how to grow new plants by propagation.
- To learn how to take cuttings.
- To use the new plants to replace older plants, fill in gaps in the school growing area or start a new growing area.

Equipment/materials needed:

- Mature herb plants such as sage, mint, lavender, thyme
- Scissors or secateurs
- Small plant pots – these could be clean tin cans, brought in from home, with a hole punched in the bottom
- Soil with some sand mixed in
- Lollipop sticks or similar
- Wooden clothes pegs to use as plant labels
- Rooting hormone
- Small plastic bags and string or elastic bands
- Watering can

Preparation:

- Explain what propagation means – by taking one cutting from an established plant and encouraging it to grow roots a new plant can be grown. Summer is the best time to take a cutting, when plants are growing actively with lots of healthy shoots.
- Talk about how this method of cloning has helped save some of the world's endangered plants.
- Using the chart over the page, take a walk around your school grounds and/or growing area to identify different herbs. Good herbs to take cuttings from include mint, sage, thyme and lavender. If you don't have any herbs in your school grounds, ask teachers and/or parents if they have any bush herbs in pots they can bring in for the day to take cuttings from.
- Encourage the children to touch and smell the plants.

What to do:

- Get the children to fill a plant pot with sandy soil to increase drainage and stop the cutting from rotting.
- Show them how to cut a shoot from this season's growth, near the top of the plant. They should choose a shoot that is about 10cm (4ins) long and no thicker than a drinking straw. The cut should be just below a leaf joint or above a bud. If their cutting is very leafy, they should trim off some of the lower leaves.
- Get the children to dip the end of the cutting in the rooting hormone then using a lollipop stick or similar as a dibber to make a hole in the compost and plant the cutting, tucking soil firmly around the stem.
- On the clothes pegs, get the children to write the name of the plant, their own name and date, and clip on to the side of the pot.
- Water the plants well and leave to drain. Tuck one or two of lollipop sticks down the sides of the pot and cover with a plastic bag, securing with string or an elastic band. The sticks will hold the bag away from the leaves.
- Keep the cuttings in a warm bright spot but out of direct sunlight, and water when the soil dries out.
- Once the plants have rooted they can be planted out. Test for roots by gently pulling the stem – if it holds, then roots have formed.

Extensions:

- Many herbs have medicinal properties. Encourage the children to investigate these – perhaps by looking at a specific period such as the Victorian or Middle Ages. How and why were herbs important? What were their uses?
- Encourage the children to take herbs home to cook with – they could, for example, add mint leaves to a glass of lemonade or use chopped up sage or rosemary to make cheese scones.