



Teaching in the Garden

A botanical garden is a wonderful way to teach your children many lessons. Here are a few of our favorite techniques for transforming a stroll in the garden into a learning experience.

1. **Alphabet hunt:** Hand your students a blank piece of paper with a different letter of the alphabet printed on each page. As you explore the gardens, challenge the students to find/write every item in the garden that begins with that letter. Remind students not to limit themselves to words they read on signs, but for example the letter B could include breezes, brown, and benches. Who can find the most? Who can be the most creative?
2. **Cactus Alley:** The Springs Preserve includes a section here in the Botanical Garden called Cactus Alley, featuring dozens of cactus species from deserts across North America. Try sketching each of the many shapes of cactus. What do they all have in common, what do they have that is different? How does each of these features help the cactus survive in a desert environment?
3. **Exploring the Senses:** A section of the Springs Preserve Botanical Garden called the Enabling Garden is specifically designed to help people with special needs explore the therapeutic world of gardening. This is a great place to learn about the five senses, as the garden was designed to heighten each of those experiences. Have the students trace their hands onto a piece of paper and fill in a different sense for each finger. What do they see, smell, or hear? Please do not taste anything in the garden, but direct them to the vegetable garden where they can describe the taste of something they have eaten previously. Please only touch with adult supervision, and be careful not to pick or harm the plants.
4. **Desert Rainbow:** When people think of the colors of the desert they think brown and red, but in truth there's a veritable rainbow of colors. Challenge your students to find as many different colors as they can in the garden. Use their critical thinking skills to ask how displaying different colors benefits the plants. For an extension of this lesson, get some paint sample cards from the local home improvement store and challenge each student to find an exact match to the color.
5. **Saving Every Last Drop:** Conservation of water is important to all organisms surviving in the desert—including humans! Find five examples in the garden of ways that people are conserving water and resources. Then find five examples of how plants are conserving water and resources!