

Expert Advice: Elements of Youth Gardens

When asked: “*What elements of design are crucial to a youth-focused garden?*”
Youth Garden experts from around the country had a lot to say!

Whitney Cohen, Education Director of Life Lab in Santa Cruz, CA

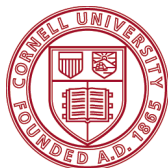
- A few things we love having in our Garden Classroom at Life Lab include:
 - Chickens, an observational beehive, and a worm bin ... the kids love visiting the animals!
 - A tunnel covered in plants.
 - A sink with 8 spigots right down at kid-height ... this has been a huge time saver when we have to wash hands as a group.
 - Lots of edibles that are delicious raw, like cherry tomatoes, sugar snap peas, and the like for garden grazing.
 - Root crops! Kids always flip out when they pull a carrot or beet or potato from the ground.
 - Nectar-suckers: Flowers kids can pick and then drink nectar from the bottom of ... here, or best one is a Jerusalem sage.
 - I also love seeing important regional crops featured in school gardens, like cotton, wheat, or sugar cane ... things kids all see in their daily lives but may have never seen growing on a plant.

Carolina Lukac, Vermont Community Garden Network's Garden Education Manager in Burlington, VT

- Shade structures can be very simple, but will be extremely useful.
- Design garden beds appropriate for children’s size.
- Include a “digging garden” for very young children.
- Have your signage designed and painted by children.

Erin Martea, Executive Director of Ithaca Children’s Garden in Ithaca, NY

- Design space that allows children to create their own experience through manipulation of loose parts, elements, and plant material underpins successful child-orientated space. While creating beautiful, whimsical displays delight adults, an abundance of time, space, and natural materials allows for boundless child-centered exploration, and keeps kids coming back again and again.



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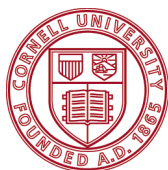


Mark Miller, Education Manager at Franklin Park Conservatory and Botanical Gardens in Columbus, OH

- A design focus based upon a child's perceptions and stages of development; child's scale, interactivity (both gross and fine motor skills) and movement. As for discrete elements: Plants (edible, decorative, fragrant, large & small), water that can be manipulated, free-form play area, areas where children can "hide" from adults, topography (high & low areas), areas/entrances that only they can use (and not adults).

Myra Manning, Maine School Garden Network Coordinator in Augusta, ME

- A garden design that makes everyone feel welcome.
- Getting input from stakeholders including teachers, parents, community members, and students themselves on what the garden should look like and what the goals are is also crucial.
- Utilizing permaculture and those design ethics, as gardens should be designed to limit the amount of management necessary and create as self-sustaining a system as possible.



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