RECEPTION & YEAR 1

Easy ways for polytunnel gardening to support the curriculum

Seven practical activities for Reception to Year 6, using a polytunnel, windowsill or school grounds.

RECEPTION

Root and veg volcanoes

1. Fill a seed tray with a 2.5cm layer of compost. Let the children shape the landscape.

2. Ask an adult to slice the tops off carrots and turnips, then plant the tops in the compost.

3. Decorate the volcano country with stones and pebbles.

4. Place on a windowsill and keep the compost damp. The tops will soon sprout green “lava”.

YEAR 1

Ready, steady, sprout

Curriculum focus: Identifying plants and their basic structures.

1. Choose seeds sold for edible sprouting, such as cress, which can be ready to eat within a week. Sow in pots or trays and place on a windowsill.

2. Keep the compost moist and check for growth every day with a magnifying glass.

3. After germination, inspect and list the parts of the plant: seed case, roots, stems and leaves.

YEARS 2 & 3

Watch plants grow and change

Explore what plants need to thrive and discover how water moves through a stem.

YEAR 2

Meadow flower monsters

Curriculum focus: Plants need water, light and a suitable temperature to grow.

1. In March, choose a sunny, weed-free site outdoors. Rake the soil and water thoroughly.

2. Mark out the outline of your monster with sand. Sow suitable wildflower seeds over the marked area and rake in, following the seed packet instructions.

3. After germination, water, tend and thin out the seedlings as needed.

4. Depending on the seed mix and conditions, the first flowers may appear by June, with others later or the following spring. Your monster can become a wildlife haven.

YEAR 3

Magic carnations

Curriculum focus: Plant structure and the transportation of water.

1. Ask an adult to make a fresh cut at the bottom of a white carnation stem. Place it in a clear container of water with about 20 drops of water-based food colouring.

2. Check regularly over the first few hours and again the following day. As water travels up the stem, the petals should gradually change colour. Timing will vary.

3. Try red or blue food colouring. Record what changes and discuss how the coloured water reached the petals.

Teacher reference: RHS - Water transportation in plants.

YEARS 4, 5 & 6

Explore, multiply and classify

Build observation skills through habitats, plant reproduction and the variety of living things.

YEAR 4

Habitat study

Curriculum focus: The changing environment.

1. Start in February with a wildlife hunt in the school grounds. List what you find, where you find it and when.

2. Discuss ways to improve habitats, such as plants for insects, bird feeders or bug boxes.

3. Repeat monthly, recording how the biodiversity changes.

YEAR 5

Multiply plants with cuttings

Curriculum focus: Plant reproduction.

1. Use a geranium to demonstrate taking cuttings. Cut a stem about 5cm long, then pinch off all the leaves except the top two.

2. Plant the shoot in cutting compost. Place in a well-lit, warm spot, keep the compost moist and watch it grow and develop.

YEAR 6

Put the world in order

Curriculum focus: Classification.

1. In a park or other open space, mark out a 1m square patch. Use a magnifying glass to look for plants and insects, then list what you find.

2. Classify your findings by their characteristics and differences.

3. Repeat monthly and record how the biodiversity changes.