

Good Plant Choices for School / Youth Gardens

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Bridge plants:

Spring/summer/fall:

Head lettuce: Plant 6 inches apart; Harvest every other head in about 30 days (during spring term); let other heads keep growing to full size (ready for early summer garden).

Snapdragons: grow from spring through frost; Select from mounding, dwarf and tall (18" – 3'). Makes nice cut flower, keeps producing throughout summer and fall.

Potatoes: plant in spring, harvest in summer or even fall, depending on variety.

Low-maintenance/cover crops/layering/companion planting: Make Your Plants Work For You!

Replace weeds with plants that do something for you, feed your soil and have plants work together to keep disease/insects under control.

Good combinations:

Tomatoes with basil (globe variety) and marigolds (mounding, planted close together)

Potatoes with sunflowers

Okra with turnips

Strawberries as natural mat

Cover crops:

winter rye (plant September, not too thick!)

Perennials / Grasses:

(useful Website: www.bluestem.ca; www.urbanext/uiuc.edu; www.mobot.org)

Grasses provide summer/fall/winter interest:

Grasses on the rooftop:

- Calamagrostis 'Karl Foerster' Feather Reed Grass ('**CALAMAGROSTIS KARL FORSTER**' A columnar, cool season, medium-sized, early-blooming ornamental grass, known for its late spring green-pink-purple inflorescence, winter effect, and vertical architectural lines. It is one of the first grasses to come out of winter dormancy. It is very winter hardy to zone 4a which makes this plant a winner for most residents of the USA.)
- Eragrostis spectabilis / Purple Love Grass (red-purple flowers in June-August and cover the plant in a reddish cloud; foliage turns reddish in the fall.
- Molinia Moorflame (compact mounds of green foliage developing rich purple autumn hues with upright dark flower stems turning a wonderful orange in winter).
- Sesleria autumnalis /Autumn Moor Grass (semi-evergreen; sun or partial shade, tufted mound, held erect late summer to fall, becomes silvery white, lime green foliage)
- Sesleria heufleriana / Blue-green Moor Grass (semi-evergreen; sun; early spring flowers are black with cream yellow pollen sacs; leaves are mostly green in early spring; becomes blue by early summer, remains blue in winter.)

Bridge plants / companion planting /succession planting

Vegetables:

Lettuces: harvest as baby heads (30-40 days); harvest the rest at full size (50 -60 days)

Cabbage: grow small headed varieties in spring and again in fall

succession planting of lettuces, radish, spinach, swiss chard

Tomato 'Glacier' - determinate tomato, bears early (58 days through full season)

Potatoes: plant early and late variety

Summer seeded plants: brussels sprouts, collard greens, fall/winter greens/lettuces

Flowers

Sunflowers : pick variety based on height, color and maturity

Zinnia: pick variety based on height, color and maturity

Snapdragons (buy in as transplants; provide bloom from early summer through frost; many varieties - mounding, short and tall)

Morning glories: plant at the end of school at the base of long-season sunflowers; they will be in full bloom in the fall

Herbs

Basil very easy to grow, lots of varieties; in addition to being good fresh, they are easy to dry indoors. Simply hang
Oregano them in bunches in a dry place (some suggest in a dark place but we do it in the very sunny workroom); Once
Dill they are dry (one to 2 weeks), rub leaves off stems into large zipper-lock bags; you can also run through a food
processor; this is a great activity for students or family/community members who drop by at the end of a session or just
occasionally. They can go in the garden, harvest some herbs, hang them indoors and return in a week or two and
the herb will be dried by then. We purchased small bottles at Scientific America

Plant mounding, border plants along rows or within plants to keep weeds under control:

Good choices: Marigold gem series, nasturtium (mounding), allyssum, snapdragons, oregano

Plant combinations of low-growing plants with taller plants:

Okra (beautiful tall -- 2.5 to 5' -- plants in the Hibiscus family; red burgundy variety has purplish leaves) plant with turnips (purple top/white globe);
harvest the turnip tops, then the bottoms, all the while enjoying Okra.

Sweet Potato bush varieties (Bunch Porto Ricos and Vardaman)

Very easy to plant, vines are dark green with purple underleaf; plant with an upright plant such as peppers or tomatoes;

Strawberries: We're going to try them this year; We are doing a mix of June-bearing and ever-bearing.