Field Study Fun

Setting Up a Field Study Plot

1. Research ahead of time to determine which plants species attract the most wildlife in your area. Whenever possible, use native species which are adapted to local weather conditions and are often attractive to wildlife. You might also select a plant that grows and/or changes quickly to maintain student interest while conducting the field study. Ask for advice at a local nature center or garden center. Suitable plants may already exist in your school's landscape or be readily available at a local nursery.
2. Once you have selected a suitable plant species, find a group of plants of that species in your landscape or plan a space in which to plant them. Rope off a square yard or suitable sized area around the plants (children may be involved in this process) to serve as your study plot. You may have one study plot and work with one small group at a time or several similar study plots that small groups can observe at the same time. With older children, you may have plots with different types of plants for a comparison study. If space is an issue, consider using container plants (see below). In many regions, spring is a good time of year to start the study.

Resources

Creating Small Habitats for Wildlife in Your Garden by Josie Briggs

The National Gardening Association Guide to Kids Gardening: A Complete Guide for Teachers, Parents and Youth Leaders by Lynn Ocone

Nature Friendly Garden: Creating a Backyard Haven for Plants, Wildlife, and People by Marlene A. Condon

Welcoming Wildlife to the Garden: Creating Backyard and Balcony Habitats for Wildlife by Catherine Johnson, Susan McDiarmid and Edward Turner

Wildlife Friendly Plants: Make Your Garden a Haven for Beneficial Insects, Amphibians and Birds by Rosemary Creeser and Steven Wooster

Wildlife Garden: Month-By-Month by Jackie Bennett

Your Backyard Wildlife Garden by Marcus Schneck

Websites

The American Horticultural Society
www.ahs.org/master_gardeners/index.htm

Find information concerning which animals are active at various times of the year in your area and information about native flowers and herbs.

National Gardening Association *www.garden.org*

For additional resources see pages 118-121.

Container Gardens

If it is desired or necessary for you to plant your own seeds, seedlings or plants in order for your students to conduct a successful field study, there are a variety of container garden options that may suit your needs. In general, containers that have rims close to the ground will allow more ground dwelling animals to visit your field study plot. Larger containers with more soil generally require less frequent watering and are less susceptible to temperature extremes—but they may be much heavier to carry if you need to bring them indoors.

Basic steps for creating a container garden are as follows:

1. Select a container such as a clay pot or planter box that is large enough for your plants at their expected size at maturity.
2. Cover the bottom of the container with small rocks. Then cover the rocks with a thick layer of potting soil.
3. Plant seeds, seedlings, or plants in the soil according to package or label directions. Check your garden every day and water as needed.
4. If you feel it is necessary, you may opt to carry your container garden indoors each evening (to protect it from vandals or large herbivores, for instance), but realize that doing so may disrupt some natural cycles of the plant or animals that use it and will bring bugs inside.

Directions: Make a copy of the **Field Study Data Sheet** for each child for each period of observation and each plant to be observed. Encourage children to circle as many pictures as appropriate for each observation period. Students can draw or paste pictures of the animals they see under "Animals Found," then circle and draw lines to indicate the "Animal Action" and location of each animal on the plant picture. Observations can also be recorded directly on the picture. With very young children, you may want to fill in the information at the top of the sheet before copying and make an extra copy for yourself (you can model and allow children to practice data collection while ensuring an accurate record). You might also choose to focus on only one set of data each time you visit the field study plot.

Field Study Data Sheet

name _____

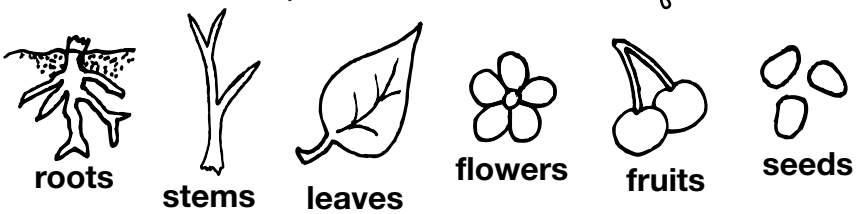
Plant Name: _____ Sample: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____ a.m. p.m.

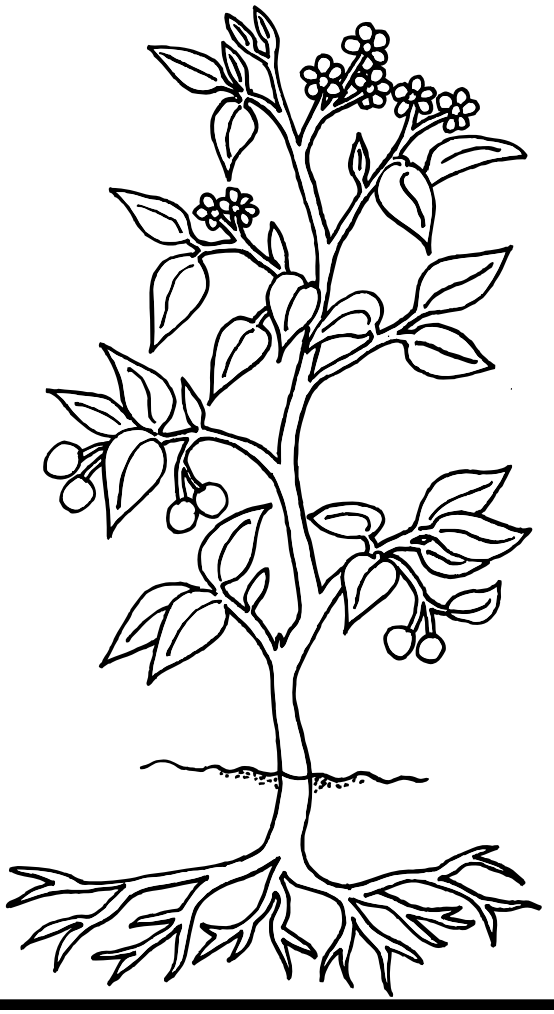
Weather Conditions:

Temperature: _____

My Plant Has:



Animals Found



Animal Actions

eat
rest
crawl
fly
climb
jump
hunt
dig
poop
fight
hide
lay eggs
tend young