

Growlab: A Gardening-Based Curriculum Guide

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Growlab is a gardening-based program designed by the National Gardening Association (Burlington, VT). The curriculum guide, *Activities for Growing Minds* (Cohen and Pranis, 1990), places a strong emphasis on the experimental and dynamic aspect of science for kindergarten through eighth grades. Instead of being cast in the role as the sole source of information, teachers are encouraged to be facilitators and co-learners with their students. Emphasis is placed on helping students develop valuable skills, such as making observations, posing testable questions, designing and conducting sound experiments (“fair tests”), and interpreting results.

The curriculum guide is designed to be flexible with student input as a key ingredient. While intended to be the springboard for further inquiry within science, and for interdisciplinary activities, the usually open-ended lab exercises are sufficiently structured so they can be tailored for a variety of competency levels. Even inexperienced gardeners can benefit greatly from the lab exercises and, in fact, the program is a tremendous confidence builder. At St. Michael's College, the Growlab curriculum guide is an important part of the laboratory in our Biology for Elementary Education Majors course, a required sophomore-year course.

There are numerous reasons for using the Growlab curriculum guide in a biology course for Elementary Education majors. The curriculum guide places a strong emphasis on the importance of making careful observations, designing fair tests and posing testable questions, and interpreting data. The guide is currently being used in many K–8 classrooms throughout the United States and can be used in future teaching endeavors. There are many opportunities to incorporate language arts, mathematics, and social skill development into the program, thus emphasizing the interrelationship of science and the liberal arts. Although geared for the K–8 age group, many of the exercises can be valuable learning experiences for college-aged students. As part of the project, students are asked to develop more sophisticated questions and approaches to the exercises that are appropriate for their own educational background. Finally, most of the materials are readily available, relatively inexpensive, and do not require sophisticated environmental conditions beyond a lighted space.

For more information about the National Gardening Association's educational materials and programs write or call: National Gardening Association, 180 Flynn Ave., Burlington, VT 05401, 802/863-1308, FAX: 802/863-5962.

Cohen, J., and E. Pranis. 1990. *Growlab: Activities for growing minds*. National Gardening Association, Burlington, Vermont, 307 pages.