



Basic Vegetable Gardening

Lesson 11: Weeding, Fertilizing and Maintaining the Garden

Lesson Summary: Members will learn the proper way to weed and maintain the garden. The lesson includes mulching, composting, weeding, and watering. It is important to monitor healthy garden practices.

Intended Learning Outcomes:

Members will know the proper way to maintain the garden.

Members will properly pull weeds from the garden.

Members will monitor the compost pile or pit and mix it as necessary.

Length: 60 minutes

Materials:

Watering cans

Organic materials for composting

Gardening tools

Materials for pesticides if necessary

Organic or inorganic materials for mulching

Background: Weeding, mulching, composting and watering are all part of tending a garden.

Lesson Steps

1. (5 minutes) – Introduction

This gathering will be used as a check-in for the garden. After discussing the major issues of maintenance, the group can be split into smaller groups to complete the work.

2. (15 minutes) – Learning about garden maintenance

Discuss garden maintenance with the whole group. You may choose to do so by reading the following information or simply discussing the major points.

2.1 (5 minutes) Discuss weeding

Why is it important to continue to weed your garden?

Answer: Weeds compete with garden plants for water, nutrients, and sunlight, and therefore should be removed as soon as possible.

When weeding, be sure to remove the roots along with the plant. Many plants will sprout again if a portion of the plant or root is left in the soil. The best way to have fewer weeds growing in your garden is to cover areas of exposed soil with mulch. Also, remove weeds from areas next to your garden so that fewer weed seeds will blow into or be carried into your garden.

If you have a lot of weeds in your garden, make sure that you have cleared the weeds 2-5 meters around the outside of the garden. Keep this area weed free to avoid harboring pests and to eliminate any unwanted sources of weed seeds.

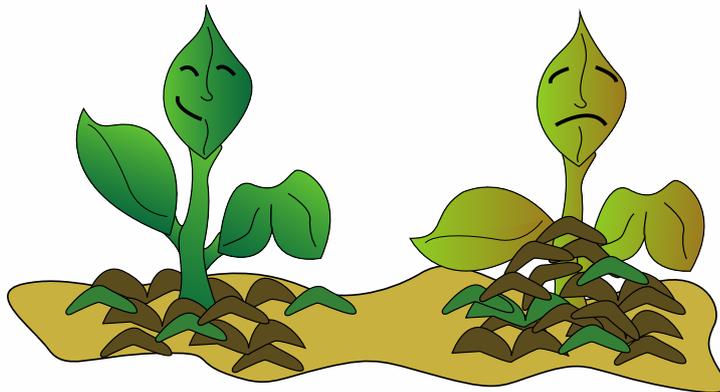
Weeds can be controlled in several ways:

- Pulling by hand
- Cultivating with a hoe where appropriate
- Using mulches generously
- Using natural or chemical herbicides

It is also important to remove spent plants and plants that have stopped producing fruits and vegetables. For example, after harvest remove all of the cucumber and squash vines. Compost these plants if they have not been infected by disease or insects. If diseased, dispose of far away from the garden.

2.2 (5 minutes) Discuss composting and fertilizing

In the previous meeting, your group set up a compost heap. At this meeting, the compost heap should be turned over and mixed together. Add any produce scraps, brown or green material that members have collected. Depending on the amount of time and climate conditions, your compost may be ready to add to your garden in a few weeks. Do so by working it into the soil with roughly one part compost to three parts soil. While a plant is growing, add compost to the base of it every several days so the soil depth remains about the same. Add compost in small doses more frequently instead of a large bunch all at once.



2.3 (5 minutes) Mulching

Recall that mulching plants is important because it not only helps to stop weeds from growing, but it also retains water for the plants during dry seasons. Today is a good day to reapply mulch to plants.

3. (35 minutes) Taking care of garden maintenance

Split the large group into three or four smaller groups. Assign one kind of garden maintenance to each of the groups. There should be:

- Weeding group – responsible for weeding and removing dead plant matter from plants.
- Compost group – responsible for adding material to compost material, turning the compost pile, and adding compost to plants if it is ready
- Mulching group – responsible for reapplying mulch to plants
- Pesticide group – if needed, to reapply natural pesticides

The groups will have about 25 minutes to work in the garden. If one group gets done with their work they can help another group.

4. (5 minutes) - Summary and Debrief

4.1 Gather the members together and discuss today's activities.

Ask the members the following questions:

- What did we do today?
- Why is it important to maintain the garden?
- What would you expect the garden to look like if we didn't maintain it?

Answer: The weeds and pests would slow the growth of plants.

- What happens in the wild when people are not maintaining open forests or grasslands?

Answer: Composting occurs naturally, but not as quickly if humans are not turning the materials to mix them up.

- Are there any current concerns about the garden?
- Is there something you would do different for next year?



4.2 Close the lesson

Tell the members when the next meeting will be and what the topic will be. (They will learn about crop rotation and vegetable families. They will be drawing designs for next season's garden.)

Have members record garden tasks in their notebooks.