

The Abundant Life Garden Project®

offered by Episcopal Relief & Development

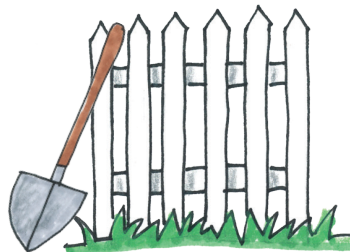
Dear VBS Director:

Welcome to **The Abundant Life Garden Project®** VBS offered by Episcopal Relief & Development. We are so honored that you have chosen this curriculum for your VBS program! In this packet you will find many tools to help you launch this project successfully. Our prayer is that this material will help you and the children you reach celebrate the many ways abundant life in God is possible.

May you continue to grow in grace,
Jerusalem Jackson Greer and
the Episcopal Relief & Development team

In this guide you will find:

- **Recommendations for your garden plot**
(aka gathering and learning spaces)
- **Preparing your garden plot of optimal growth**
- **Rotation Suggestions**
- **List of supplies needed**
- **Communication Strategies**
- **Timeline**
- **Working with Children tips**
- **Working with Volunteers**
- **Explanation of supplemental resources and tools**
- **Full Garden Lessons**



Making the Project Come Alive

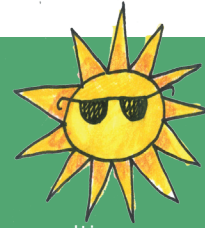
Recommendations for the Garden Plot - *Choosing your gathering and learning spaces*

One of the very thing any gardener or farmer must do is to assess the needs of their crops or livestock, then they must work hard to choose from the options available to them, the best location to meet those needs. The same is true when choosing the spaces where you will host your VBS. For **The Abundant Life Garden Project®** we suggest the following space accommodations:

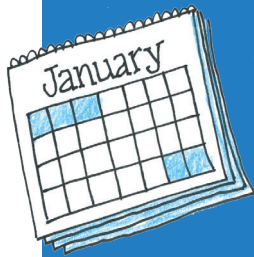


Gather and Go

Opening and Closing Growing Zone



- **The Greenhouse** - A large gathering space - Ideas include: a gym, multi-purpose room, Nave, or Parish Hall, or a backyard. Anywhere your entire group will be able to gather together will work.



Listen

Story-based Growing Zones

- **Stories from the Field Growing Zone** - Ideas include: Moderate size classroom, shady outdoor area with benches or blankets for sitting. If possible this space should be decorated to look like a developing nation marketplace or small farm (more about this in the **Preparing your Plot** section.)
- **Stories from our Faith Growing Zone** - Ideas include: Moderate size classroom, shady outdoor area with benches or blankets for sitting, or church library. (There will be more about decorating ideas for this space in the **Preparing your Plot** section.)



Do

Activity Growing Zones

Remember, in addition to Nutrients, you only need to **choose two** of the following activities for each day. You are welcome to do all four if you have time, but it is not required.

- **Nutrients (aka snacks) Growing Zone** - Ideas: Parish Hall, backyard or picnic area, or a large classroom. Ideally this space would be large enough for two groups to snack at one time and have access to running water.
- **Learning Growing Zone** - Ideas: Small classroom, lobby area, shaded outdoor area, perhaps under a tent. This Zone will function differently everyday, and does not always need a "room."
- **Creative Growing Zone** - Ideas: Parish Hall, tented area in a parking lot, large classroom. A space where children can be messy and have ease of access to craft supplies and running water.
- **Contemplative Growing Zone** - Ideas: Narthex, Nave, Chapel, Shaded area of a courtyard. Any space that will foster meditative practices.
- **Garden Growing Zone** - Local church or community garden or flower beds.



Preparing the Garden Plot

For **The Abundant Life Garden Project®** we suggest outfitting the spaces with the following:

Gather and Go

Opening and Closing Growing Zone

SUPPLIES NEEDED

For Children:

- Garden Journal (Either purchased or pre-made. You can use small notebooks from dollar stores, or make your own out of construction paper, copier paper and staples.)
- Name Tag and lanyard with their Pod color or symbol.
- Optional: Small gardening apron

For Classrooms:

- Each Space should be outfitted with writing utensils.

For Greenhouse Space

Each day you will need the following in the Greenhouse space:

- Large clear bowl
- Tables for coloring
- Markers and Crayons
- Tape

For Volunteers

- Nametags
- Optional: Garden Aprons (we suggest using inexpensive canvas work aprons and letting volunteers embellish them.)

The Greenhouse - A large gathering space

- Garden Wall - In this space you will need to create the interactive Garden Wall. This "wall" can be an existing wall, a room divider, or simply a trifold board. The wall will need to be accessible to the children throughout the week.
- Large Clear Bowl - You will need one extra-large clear bowl for each opening session.
- Music and Prayer Words - Depending on the size of your group you will need a way to display - either on a large screen, whiteboard, flip chart or handouts - the words to your songs and prayers.
- Creative Station - During the each session opening children will need a place to color or write.

Listen

Story-based Growing Zones



Stories from the Field Growing Zone

- Ideally this room should be decorated to look like either a developing country marketplace, or small home farm. Consider using pop-up tents, colorful fabrics, produce crates, or sections of wood fencing. **For more specific ideas visit our Pinterest boards.**
- Make sure there is a working clock that is visible to the teacher.

Stories from our Faith Growing Zone

- If you are following the Old Testament or New Testament tracks, consider decorating your space to reflect biblical times and history. Bible maps, and scrolls on the walls, a floor covered with rugs and pillows for sitting during story time, and palm trees and clay pots in the corners. A simple search of Desert VBS on Pinterest will also bring up great ideas.
- If you are following the BCP track, consider decorating the room like a library, or an Episcopal scholars office. Post pictures of the Episcopal Shield, and maps of the Anglican Communion on the walls, along with poster copies of The Lord's Prayer and the Nicene Creed. Globes, and a variety of Prayer Book editions could be scattered around the room.
- Make sure there is a visible clock.



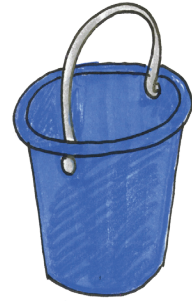
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Activity Zones

- There are no specific instructions for decorating these spaces other than to make sure there are working clocks in each space so that teachers are not tempted to look at their phones for time.

Schedule Quick Look

This is a quick overview of some of the more hands-on/supply heavy portions of each day. **Stories from Our Faith, Stories from the Field,** and **Contemplation Activities** are not included in this table.



Day	Garden Options	Snacks	Creative	Learning	Songs
Water	Watering Rain Barrel Irrigation	Apple Boats Ocean Water	Water Filter	Water Walk	Deep and Wide River of Life Peace Like a River
Soil	Soil Prep Soil Testing Worm Farm	Dirt Cake Cups	Erosion Experiment	Gardner/Farmer Interview	Thank You God for Water, Soil and Air This Pretty Planet For the Beauty of the Earth
Seeds	Seed Starting Garden markers	Nuts and Seeds Dippers	Bird Feeder	What Should I Do With Seeds?	For the Fruit of All Creation God's Got the Whole World in God's Hands* This Pretty Planet All Things Bright and Beautiful For the Beauty of the Earth
Animals	Animal Fertilizer Animal Visit Beekeeeeer Visit	Animal Cracker Safari	Making Butter	Gifts for Life Playing Cards	God's Got the Whole World in God's Hands** All Creatures Great and Small Old Saint Isidore Had a Farm (to the tune of Old MacDonald - St Isidore is one of the Patron Saints of Farmers Arky Arky
Harvest	Harvest Garden Commercial Taste Test	Veggie or Fruit Pizza	Produce Painting	Veggie Peeling	For the Fruit of All Creation God's Got the Whole World in God's Hands

* Insert different Seeds for each verse

** Insert different Animals for each verse

Rotation Recommendations

Rotations for VBS can be a complicated thing, but the number one tip is to remember to do what works best for your group. This is our suggested rotation schedule with the assumption that you offer all of the activities offered in the **DO Zone**. The total time we have allocated is 3 hours. This can be shortened by cutting DO activities, and expanded by adding a recess session. Some Zones will have two groups when needed in order to give each leader one break session.

PODS - Each pod should be made up of 5-20 children depending on the size of your VBS. You will need one Pod per activity, excluding the Opening and Closing sessions. You can name your Pods whatever you would like, we have chosen color names for this demonstration. Red Pod, Green Pod, Blue Pod, Purple Pod, Orange Pod, Pink Pod, Yellow Pod. Each pod should rotate through each zone at 20 min intervals with time for traveling/bathroom stops. The opening and closing sessions should be approx 15 minutes.

Pods

Opening	Field	Faith	Learn	Create	Contemplative	Garden	Snack	Closing
All pods								
Pod 1	Red	Blue	Yellow	Green	Orange	Pink	Purple	
Pod 2	Pink	Purple	Orange	Yellow	Green	Blue	Red	
Pod 3	Purple	Yellow	Blue	Pink	Red	Orange	Green	
Pod 4	Orange	Green	Purple	Blue	Yellow	Red	Pink	
Pod 5	Green	Red	Pink	Orange	Blue	Purple	Yellow	
Pod 6	Blue	Pink	Green	Red	Purple	Yellow	Orange	
Pod 7	Yellow	Orange	Red	Purple	Pink	Green	Blue	
								All Pods

Teachers and their Resources

Each pod should have a minimum of two Master Gardeners (group leaders) who travel with the children from Zone to Zone. These volunteers are also the prime welcoming faces during each opening, and the restroom escorts. Below is a list of the other volunteers needed and the resources found that they will need for their classes (this does not include activity, craft supplies or snack ingredients.)

Zone	Volunteers	Resources
Opening	Song Leader, Opening Leader, Youth Helpers, All Pods Leaders	List of Songs, Welcome and Release Script booklet, Coloring sheets found in Printables Packet
Stories from the Field	Storyteller, Jr. Storyteller	Stories from the Field Booklet Stories from the Field Links Computer and Screen Copy of Lesson Plans
Stories from our Faith	Storyteller, Jr. Storyteller	Stories from our Faith Booklet Bible and/or copies of BCP Copy of Lesson Plans
Learning Zone	Learning Leader Jr. or Assistant Leader	Lesson Plans
Creative Zone	Creative Leader Jr. or Assistant Leader	Lesson Plans
Garden Zone	Garden Leader Jr. or Assistant Leader, 2-4 extra Volunteers if needed	Lesson Plans
Snack Zone	Snack Coordinator 2-4 Snack Helpers	VBS Snack-Handout
Closing	Song Leader, Opening Leader	List of Songs, Welcome and Release Script Booklet

Tips for a Successful VBS

Director note: The following information will be helpful for both you and members of your team. Please review thoroughly then make copies for your team members as needed.

Planning Timeline

6-9 Months Ahead

- Begin praying for your VBS program with your clergy and staff.
- Choose your dates and time for your VBS and put them on the church calendar.
- Choose a VBS Director.
- Share the **The Abundant Life Garden Project**® VBS offered by Episcopal Relief & Development materials with the Director.

3-6 Months Ahead

- Set a budget for your VBS program.
- Recruit key leaders – Music, Snacks, Storytellers, Master Gardeners
- Plan publicity for your VBS.

2-3 Months Ahead

- Put together lists of supplies you'll need.
- Plan and schedule a VBS staff training meeting to be held 4 - 6 weeks prior to VBS.
- Begin recruiting additional leaders and support staff.
- With your key staff, explore your church facilities to determine what areas you will need.
- Estimate your VBS enrollment. Use figures from Sunday school or last year's VBS.

8 Weeks Ahead

- Order student supplies if you have not already done so.
- Begin publicizing
- Begin pre-registration online.
- Meet with key leaders.

6 Weeks

- Hold the scheduled VBS staff training meeting.
- Check your registration weekly and order any extra supplies you may need.
- Begin weekly online reminders.

4 Weeks

- Order decorations and volunteer items.
- Open VBS registration on Sunday Mornings.

2 Weeks

- Personal recruitment.
- Final prep meeting of staff

1 Week

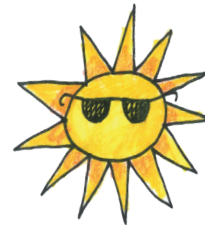
- Commissioning Liturgy for VBS
(we suggest this: <https://www.buildfaith.org/a-blessing-for-vacation-bible-school/>)
- Put together class rosters from your pre-registered kids.
- Decorate your church for your VBS program.
- Review and check all details: schedule, signs, supplies. Assign a place and time for all VBS staff to meet for prayer before each day of VBS.

Week Of:

- Pray daily for God to move in the hearts of your children and for the work of Episcopal Relief and Development.
- Check with key leaders each day to see how things went.
- Have FUN!



Working with Children



Here are some simple tips for working with kids that you can share with your volunteers.

1. Always interact with children from a place of love. All children, regardless of age or appearance, need to feel wanted and accepted. Make sure to welcome kids warmly each day, and always be ready with smiles, giggles, encouraging words.

2. Work hard to learn names. When you call a child by his or her name, you are validating their identity as beloved. Make sure easy-to-read nametags are always on you and each child so that this is easy to practice.

3. Use active learning. The more children can actively be involved in their learning, the more connected they will feel.

4. Be present! Do your best to leave your phone off or in your bag during your teaching times. If time management is a concern, consider wearing a watch. Also, do not discuss your personal life in front of children, or group up with other leaders or volunteers. Kids deserve your full attention while in your presence.

5. Be prepared for down time. Find activities to do when you have a few free minutes so all time is being used in a fun and productive way. Keep trivia or "Would you Rather" or Red Light/Green Light type of games in mind.

6. Dress the part. Make sure that you are in comfortable clothes that are made for active movement and you can get dirty. If you are a storyteller, consider dressing in character. All other leaders and helpers should consider dressing in "gardening duds" - Overalls, garden aprons, straw hats etc.

7. Be rooted in your Baptism. Make sure to interact with all adults and children in a way that follows the apostles' teachings, humbly repents of mistakes, proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ, strives for justice and peace among all people, respects the dignity of everyone, and seeks and serves Christ in all persons, all with God's help.

8. Pray. Before and after each session, leaders and volunteers should gather for prayer. (You may want to use Prayer 46, pg 829 for your opening prayer and a prayer of Thanksgiving after your closing.) You may also want to divide up the names of your children and pray for them individually.

9. Be aware of age level needs. With younger children, activities need to be hands-on, concrete, short, and simple. Older children love to talk and are processing and questioning information.

10. Call out the good! Children generally rise to the level expected of them, so call out to their better natures. Verbalize that you believe that they are capable of learning, listening, and engaging.

14. Be prepared. Read through your lessons, any training information, ask questions if you are unclear, and prepare materials for which you are responsible ahead of time.

15. Work together. Do not speak negatively around children regarding other leaders, the programs, or other children or church members. At all times try and keep a positive attitude.

16. Remember to take bathroom breaks. The younger the child, the more important this is!

Communication Strategies

Clearly communicating the fun that children and volunteers will have at **The Abundant Life Garden Project®** VBS offered by Episcopal Relief & Development should be an essential part of your VBS planning strategy. Here are a few tips to help you get started.

- **Early and Often:** Begin communicating registration for children and volunteers early - at least 8 weeks out. Repeat your communication efforts weekly until the last four weeks, then go to twice weekly. This can be via Social Media, Church Newsletter, Email Blast etc.
- **Tell the kids:** Make sure to message the kids as well as adults. Talk about VBS with kids during Sunday School, Children's Chapel, Youth Groups and one on one.
- **Avoid too much paper passing:** When possible use digital reminder options. BUT make sure to include the announcement in your church bulletin or other weekly information update.
- **Group texts:** Send parents and volunteers registration reminders with a link, then daily reminders during the week of VBS.
- **Word of mouth is key:** Ask everyone who is participating to tell five people about VBS!
- **Go Local:** Local papers, online groups, and boosted Facebook posts are helpful when inviting the larger community.
- **Tag, Your It!** Invite members to promote your VBS on their own social media accounts, making sure to tag the Church.
- **#VBS:** Establish social media tags that your members can use and share.
- **Online Registration:** Google Forms or other programs are available to create easy to use online registrations. If possible, set up a computer or iPad station in the church lobby or outside Sunday School classrooms to help register kids on Sundays.
- **Your Website!** Remember to use church website to clearly and cohesively post registration, information, forms, contact numbers.

Thanks to VBS experts Emily Slitcher Given and Lisa Brown for the use of these great tips. More of their tips can be found on their webinar at <https://www.buildfaith.org/webinar-vbs-2017/>

Safe Church

Please follow your churches Safe Church plan when hosting your VBS. If you need additional information on how to create a Safe Church plan for VBS we recommend beginning with this article <https://www.buildfaith.org/how-to-practice-safe-church-for-vbs-and-summer-programs/> and following through with the Safeguarding Online courses.

Volunteers

Finding and training VBS volunteers can feel like a full-time task if you are not prepared. We have gathered a list of wonderful articles that can help you prepare for both recruiting and training your VBS staff.



Staffing Your VBS by Lisa Brown <https://www.buildfaith.org/staffing-your-vbs-how-to-find-volunteers/>

Training Teens to help with VBS by Lisa Brown <https://www.buildfaith.org/training-teens-vbs/>

How to be an Amazing VBS Volunteer by Amber Schlosser <https://www.buildfaith.org/being-a-vbs-volunteer/>