



## Classroom Activity

**Grade Levels:** K-5

**Objective:** Create a living moss garden.

**Time:** 1-2 hours

**Materials:**

- Moss gathered from wooded/shaded areas
- Hand shovel
- Potting soil
- Tray with edge about 1-inch tall for growing your moss garden
- Tray for collecting moss
- Spray bottle with water

**Laying the Groundwork:**

A moss garden is a great way to bring some green indoors. It's inexpensive, easy to care for, and can be a lot of fun for kids of all ages. This how-to guide was created along with photos to visually demonstrate the process of making a moss garden.

## How to Create a Moss Garden



**Exploration**

- Gather your tools for harvesting moss. You will need a hand shovel and a tray to place moss in once it is collected.
- Moss can be found in most climates (It may be difficult to locate moss in dry areas, especially in the Intermountain and Southwestern U.S. Consider replacing moss with ground covers or other popular low-growing plants in these areas.) Inspect moist areas where there is at least partial shade. Some places to look are under trees, on rocks near wooded streams, and near the base of old homes.



- Harvest the moss using a metal hand-held trowel or a broad metal putty knife. If the moss is growing on a piece



of rotting wood, try to collect the wood as well. If the moss is growing in the soil try to collect ½ inch to one inch of the soil beneath the moss. Moss does not have roots; it has protonema which pushes through the ground or attaches to surfaces to anchor the plant. A clump of moss is actually made up of many protonema grouped together.



- Place the harvested moss in the tray to avoid damaging the plants. Collect as much moss as you think you will need to cover the entire surface of your moss garden tray. Look for moss of different varieties-different growth habits, colors, moss growing on small rocks/sticks. Using variety in your moss garden will make it more interesting and unique.



*A typical moss protonema with buds (magnified)*  
Image taken from [An Encyclopedia of New Zealand](#)

- While you are outside, consider other elements you may want to incorporate into your moss garden. Imagine this space as a miniature garden. If you would like to give the look of a pathway you could collect small pebbles. You could use stones about the size of your child's fist to represent boulders. Encourage your child to get creative and imagine what kind of garden adventure they want to simulate through their moss garden.
- Once you have collected enough moss prepare your moss garden tray by laying about an inch of soil in the base. Be sure to moisten the soil with a spray bottle filled with water. Tamp the surface of the soil by pressing your hand down firmly on the surface. Moss prefers growing on firm surfaces.
- When the soil is moist throughout, you can begin designing your moss garden. Look at the elements you have collected for your garden. If you are incorporating a "path", a larger rock, stick, or any elements other than moss, think of the placement of those and how you want your overall garden to turn out before planting any of the moss.
- With your design concept in mind, you can begin placing the moss on the soil surface. You don't need to dig any holes, just firmly press the moss in contact with the surface. Piece the following patches of moss so the edges are touching. You should cover the entire soil surface with your moss garden elements. Keep in mind the idea of how to place moss of different heights to create an interesting visual feature.

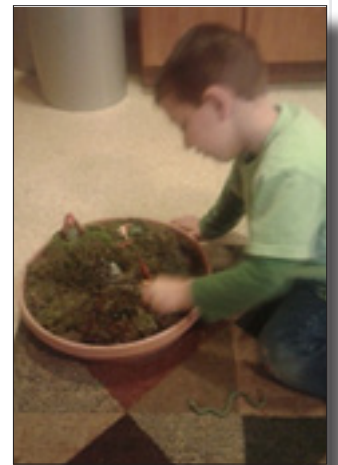




- As you add moss, if you are ready to add a pathway, you can place pebbles directly on the soil surface in a meandering formation. Keep the width of the pathway relative to the size of the overall garden. If you make the pathway too wide or too narrow for your garden size it may look awkward. Add other features as you desire.
- Once the entire soil surface is covered your moss garden is just about complete. You will need to monitor the moisture almost daily for the first few weeks. You can use a spray bottle with water and spray the surface of the moss to add moisture.
- If your child would like to add some miniature toy animals/people/other ornamental effects they can do that at this time.

### Digging Deeper:

As your moss garden becomes established have your child monitor the development. They can do this by keeping a journal located near the moss garden. Every few days they should note changes to the garden. Perhaps a certain type of moss is growing vertically, while others seem to remain compact. Your child may also notice whether or not the moss garden appears to be establishing successfully where it is located. Allow your child to take responsibility for this garden by determining if it needs to be moved to an area with more/less sunlight, more/less of a draft, or other conditions.



*Activity created by National Gardening Association staff.*