

SUMMER SESSIONS TOP TIPS



WELCOME

Take time to welcome people and explain how the timing will work. Each session gives people options of what they can do. Allow space for people to sit and relax in the garden if they wish. We want people of all abilities to feel comfortable and at home. Invite involvement but never pressurise.

1

2

IN THE GARDEN

Source the materials needed in advance and set up so things are easy to access. You don't need to be a gardening expert and its ok to not have all the answers - just say 'that's a great question I'll look that up'. YouTube is a great place to gain tips and advice, so if your are planting corn for instance, watch a clip on how to do it in advance. It will give you answers to most of your questions.



CRAFT / ACTIVITY

3

Craft materials and activities need to be set up in advance of people arriving. You can have the craft run alongside the gardening or you can do it before or after gardening activity. People enjoy having a choice of what they can do.

REFLECTION

5



4

The Reflection section sits alongside the actions of gardening, crafts, conversation and other activities. It's an important way of linking the work of our hands and the building of community to scripture, and is meant to enhance the actions, to help us to connect our faith to everyday life and find positive ways of living during these challenging times of ecological breakdown. Please adapt it and make it your own, to fit your context and community.

DISCUSSION

Give plenty of time for discussion. Let people use their voices and experiences to form a mosaic of thought on the topic. We have provided questions and you may want to add your own. Make them open-ended and allow people to build a shared understanding from their conversations and experience.

SUMMER SESSION 1 BE STILL



WELCOME

1

This step is the same each time. Think through how to welcome everyone who comes into the garden. Have everything set up before they come so you can focus on welcoming. If possible have hot / cold drinks available as people arrive.

Start by saying the Hazelnut prayer together (if preferred, a responsive version is available on the website).

Loving Lord God, heartbeat of all creation,
Thank you for today, for this place and these people,
Would you meet us in earth, in seed and soil and in each other
Would you meet us in the beautiful ordinary
Meet us in hard work and play and a great cup of tea,
Sing us to stillness, and guide us to peace
Close to all that is created
May your love take root in us
Growing deep so we know we and all creation belong,
and that all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well.
Bless this day, all that is growing, all that is complete,
all that is yet to be finished.
That all may be in you and you may be in all. Amen.

SUMMER SESSION 1 BE STILL



IN THE GARDEN

2

This week's focus is on bee-friendly flowers. Talk together about the importance of supporting pollinator populations and the contribution that garden flowers can make. There is lots of information online. eg: www.wildlifetrusts.org/savingbees.

Take a look round your garden. What kinds of pollinator-friendly plants can you identify? Are there gaps in the garden where you could plant some more? What colours do you want to go for? Imagine you are painting with plants to create a unique space. Also, think about the height and space needed for each plant. Here are some examples of bee-friendly flowers in the UK. You could grow some from seed or buy ready-to-plant.



Lavender



Hollyhock



snapdragon



Thyme



Chives



Salvia

SUMMER SESSION 1

BE STILL



CRAFT / ACTIVITY

3

Snail racing:

Nothing is as slow as a snail! Snail racing is a fun activity and gives the opportunity to pay close attention to these invertebrates which we share our gardens with (rather reluctantly!). Before you start, spend some time talking about all creatures being valuable and part of God's creation. Even though snails can eat their way through our veg patch, they also play an important role in breaking down plant matter and creating compost. Make sure children treat the snails gently and with respect - they really are remarkable creatures when you take a close look.

Next get everyone to hunt around your garden, looking under pots or rocks and in dark places to find some largish snails. Have a large plastic tub with a lid to put them in, with a few leaves or bits of bark for them to hide under. You'll need a smooth flat surface to race them on. Make sure it is cool and damp and that you keep the tub out of direct sun. Race them between two lines or from a circle outwards and see which one crosses the finish line first! After a few races, retire the snails to the comfort of your compost heap or a nearby nature area. Remember to wash your hands afterward!



SUMMER SESSION 1 BE STILL



REFLECTION

Psalm 46:10 God says, 'Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.'

In the tranquillity of a garden, amidst the vibrant tapestry of nature, there lies a sacred invitation to 'Be still and know that I am God'.

4

As you stand amidst creation, there's an inherent call to surrender to the moment, to let go of the hurried pace of life, and to embrace the serenity that the garden graciously offers. It is a space where time seems to slow, allowing for prayer and connection. Look around you - what do you notice? Are there surprising signs of beauty and creation? Are there things growing that you didn't plant or tiny creatures who call this garden their home? In this space is a reminder of the divine artistry of God who paints the canvas of existence, each flower and blade of grass a stroke in the masterpiece of life. Breathe deeply - there is nothing you need to do right now but be here.

The stillness in the garden is not just the absence of noise but an invitation to attune yourself to the subtle whispers of the divine. It is an opportunity to quieten your mind and to release burdens you are carrying. It is not easy to slow down and be still. We live fast lives, the demands on us great and the world is complicated. It can be difficult to let go of worry and stress. Just come as you are and be still. Lay down those burdens, even if just for a short time. There is no pressure to perform or need to succeed. Just bring yourself and breath in the peace of the garden.

As we slow down and are still, the garden becomes a sacred space of prayer, a place where the spiritual and the physical connect. As you close your eyes and breathe in the fragrant air, you may feel the gentle embrace of a presence beyond comprehension - a reminder that, in the stillness, you are not alone. "I am God"- is an affirmation that echoes through the stillness, a declaration of love, wisdom and connection that permeates the very essence of the natural world. Embrace the sacred pause. Be still, and let the gentle breeze carry away the worries. Know that in the silent communion with nature, you are enveloped in the arms of God, and the garden becomes a sacred whisper of the eternal truth; "I am God."

You might like to leave times of silence between the paragraphs of this reflection or to finish with a time of quiet. If appropriate, invite people to find a space in the garden to be quiet on their own. Let people know how long the silence will be and how you will mark the ending - you could just ask people to return or ring a quiet bell.

SUMMER SESSION 1 BE STILL



DISCUSSION

5

Here are some possible questions. You can reword them so they best fit your community or come up with some other questions. It is helpful to break into smaller groups so people have space to share. Make sure to honour and listen to all the answers. Leave space for feedback from each group

- How did it feel to stop slow down and be still?
- Does our culture have the balance right between activity and business over being still and rest?
- How is stillness a part of your everyday life? What else might you try to help you slow down and be still?
- Is there a difference between being still and praying? How are they similar or different?