FAMILY ACTIVITY: PLANTING SEEDS

During this activity, youth will learn about gardening while celebrating farmers as hometown heroes. Youth will learn about the developmental stages of a plant from seed to plant and will apply that knowledge to planting a seed and caring for it beyond the activity. Finally, youth will learn about the health benefits of gardening, which include mental health and improved mental clarity, physical activity, and provision of healthy food if the plant is edible.

MATERIALS AND INSTRUCTIONS

Materials
- Seed Story worksheet - 1 per participant (see end of this document)
- Coloring tools (including markers)
- 8 oz paper cups - 1 per participant with holes punched in the bottom
- Seed starting mix - about 6 oz per participant
- Seeds - 1 per participant (I recommend lettuce, kale, or okra)
- Spray bottle
- Caring for Seeds, Seedlings, and Plants handout (see end of this document)

Instructions
Engage youth in a discussion about farming and gardening
1. Ask youth if they think that people grow food in the city on farms or in gardens?
   
   It's estimated that there are approximately 38 farms in Chicago, but most are relatively small. Additionally, there are about 600 community gardens that produce food in Chicago. Many people also grow small amounts of food in their yards or on their patios, and those numbers have not been counted.

2. Ask youth why farms and gardens that grow food are important

   Farms and gardens are important because they provide food for us. Farms in Chicago are especially important because they provide local food, or food that is fresher and has fewer food miles (distance that food travels to get to us). Farmers and gardeners are important because they are the ones that work in the farms and gardens so that we have food to eat.

3. Ask youth if they have ever helped take care of a plant before

4. Tell youth that today we will be planting a seed so that we can grow our own food just like farmers and gardeners

Transition to the seed story activity
1. Give the seed story worksheet and coloring utensils to each participants
2. Read the steps that a seed takes when it’s planted. As you read the steps, ask participants to draw what they hear you talking about on their worksheet

   1. Fill your pot almost to the top with soil
   2. Poke a hole in the middle with your pinky finger, but only put ½ of your finger in the soil
   3. Add one seed
3. Ask youth what seeds need to grow into a plant

Seeds need soil, water and sunlight to grow into a plant.

### Transition to planting seeds

1. Give each participant an 8 oz paper cup, marker and seed starting mix
2. Ask each participant to write their name on their cup and the name of the seed that they will be planting
3. Guide youth through the steps of planting a seed, asking them to share with you what the next step is after they complete each step

1. Fill your pot almost to the top with soil
2. Poke a hole in the middle with your pinky finger, but only put ½ of your finger in the soil
3. Add one seed
4. Gently cover the seed with soil
5. Water your seed until the soil in the pot is damp but not too wet (We recommend watering with a spray bottle so that you don’t accidently displace the seed)
6. Place your pot in a warm location. Make sure that you water it whenever the soil gets dry.
7. Once you see a sprout you can put it outside in the sun.

### Discuss the health benefits of gardening and farming

1. Ask youth why they think that gardening or growing your own food might be healthy
2. Share information below about the health benefits of gardening

- Gardening is good for mental health - helps you relax, can clear your head, can make you feel better
- Gardening can be a type of physical activity or exercise
- If you grow things that you can eat, gardening can give you healthy food that is good for your body

### QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE

1. What did you like about planting seeds? What didn’t you like?
2. Would you like to grow more food than just the seed we planted today?
3. What is your favorite fruit and vegetable? Do you think that we can grow these foods?
4. Which health benefit of gardening do you think is the most important and why?

### REFERENCES, MODIFICATIONS, & EXTENSIONS

**References**

Modifications

- This activity is most age appropriate for youth ages 5-8. Modify the activity for older youth by following any of the directions below
  - Youth can use Chicago Urban Agriculture Mapping Project’s map to find community gardens and urban farms closest to where they live.
    - Use what you find on the map to make a drawing of how close the gardens and farms are to where you live.
    - Contact the gardens and farms closest to you to learn more information about what they grow and how you can support them

Extensions

Create your own upcycled watering can to water your seeds once they sprout

1. Locate a disposable plastic water bottle with a cap
2. Using a thumb tack, nail or small drill bit, poke several small holes in the bottom of the water bottle. You want water to be able to come out of the holes, but not rush out because that could damage plants
3. Decorate your upcycled watering can however you’d like
4. Fill your water bottle up, put the camp on, and hold cap-side down so that water does not drain out
5. When you’re ready to water, flip the bottle upside down so that the holes point toward the ground
6. Reuse every time you need to water your plants
Caring for Seeds, Seedlings, and Plants

Your child planted a seed today during camp as part of an activity to learn about farmers, a hometown hero, during Hometown Heroes Week!

Care for planted seeds:
1. Water every time soil is dry, making sure not to turn soil to mud
2. It is not necessary to keep the planted seed in the sun

Care for seedlings (once your seed creates a green sprout):
1. Water every time soil is dry, making sure not to turn soil to mud
2. Place seedling in a sunny place indoors

Care for plants (once your seedling has 4 sets of leaves):
1. Water every time soil is dry, making sure not to turn soil to mud
2. Keep seedling in a sunny place indoors.
3. You will likely need to replant your plant into a larger container at this time
4. If you would like to plant your plant outside, harden it off by placing it outside for a couple of hours each day to prepare it for the outdoors before planting outside.