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Things to do at gardening sessions during the winter months

Things go a little quieter in the winter, but I am going to show you a few things I do at the sessions I run at this time of the year.

My wheelbarrow rides are becoming as popular as the donkey rides at Blackpool. I have children queuing up and I usually end up crawling to the van with exhaustion at the end of the session. But it is great fun and I keep telling myself it's great for my personal fitness.

My biggest challenge when running these sessions is keeping the cost down as the organizers are usually working on a fairly tight budget. I get wicker hanging baskets and wicker hand baskets from shops that sell things for £1. The children love to fill these with soil and then plant them up with winter pansies. I try to get plants that are in bloom as this gives them an instant result and something to show everyone. If the budget will not run to hanging baskets or if the group is just too big a large plant pot will do the same job. I think the main thing is to try and always send the children home with something they have made at the session, as this not only fills them with enthusiasm it also sends this through the family.



Sometimes the sessions are not just for children, they are for mums and dads with their children or grandma and granddads with their grandchildren. Once again they love to make something they can take home. This first hanging basket or pot can be the start of them wanting to add to

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this floral display outside their house. Then other people down the street think 'Oh that looks nice' and will join in. Then cars come past from other streets and think the same. By the time you have finished a good percentage of the community may have joined in and what a difference this can make.

I also get the children or families to make wooden boxes. These can be used for herbs or flowers and can be placed on the ground, window bottoms or wall tops. They can be adapted to any size depending on where they are going and are perfect to make at one of these sessions.

When I go to a nursery or playgroup I have all the children sat in a circle and every child hammers a nail in with my help. This teaches them about, and encourages them to use teamwork.

The wood can be any bits that are left over that the wood merchant wants to sell off, or pieces from a pallet. The boxes can be made really cheaply and it is not as important to use treated wood as a lot of the children love to paint and decorate these small boxes.

I usually use 24" lengths of 3" wide, $\frac{3}{4}$ " thick wood. You will need seven lengths of these to make a box and a 24" length of 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ " by 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ " wood. You will also need 40 in number of 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ " flat head nails.



The making of the wooden box is exactly the same principle as when we made the big wooden raised beds in last year's May/June issue.

Firstly cut the 24" length of 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ " by 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ " into four equal 6" lengths. Then cut one of the seven pieces of 24" lengths into four equal 6" lengths.

I personally believe in letting the children have a go with the saw as it is one of the many life skills that can be learnt through gardening. I make them put both hands on the saw handle and make sure no one is stood too near. When they have nearly cut through the wood I make sure the saw will not fall onto their legs when the wood goes through. I really do believe there is a safe way of doing everything and obviously when they have finished sawing I put it out of their way.

Once the sawing is over place two of the 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ " by 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ " 6" lengths on the ground and fasten two of the 6" lengths of 3" wide wood to them. Repeat this process again, so you have your two short sides of the box.

Then stand both sides on level ground and nail two of the 24" lengths of wood to each side. Repeat this process to make both long sides of the box. You then need to fasten the remaining two 24" lengths of wood to form a bottom for the box.

The box then just needs filling with compost or soil and then planting up with whatever you choose – beautiful coloured pansies or tasty herbs for cooking.

We had two sessions at Haworth Primary School where the children made boxes with their parents, grandparents or carers. While they were doing this a few of the children made soup in the new school cookery room, to warm everyone up afterwards. They were then given a recipe and the ingredients to make the soup at home just to show them how easily and cheaply a healthy meal can be made.

