

### Materials (optional)

- Magnifying glasses (1 per student group)
- Garden journals and pencils

### Preparation

- Harvest dandelion leaves to use as example.
- Select a garden bed to investigate as a class.

## PROCEDURE

### Part 1: Group – Brainstorming Unique Describing Words & Inventing Plant Names

- **Group Activity 1:** Bring some leaves of a dandelion plant into the garden classroom. As a class, come up with five unique describing words for the dandelion. What makes the dandelion leaf different from other leaves?
- Based on our descriptions, have the class make-up some names for the dandelion. Share that the French call the plant ‘dandelion’ because the leaf appears to have ‘teeth of the lion.’
- **Group Activity 2:** Arrange students evenly around a garden bed. As a group, pick a plant from the garden bed. Have students 1) take a mental snapshot of the plant by staring at it for a few seconds; 2) brainstorm five unique describing words for the plant; 3) come up with a name for the plant. Repeat these three steps as a group for one or two more plants.

### Part 2: Independent Movement – Plant Journals

- Review expectations for independent movement in the classroom: students can work alone or with a partner; students must move safely and slowly in the garden; students must be careful not to hurt the plants or insects; students may not leave the defined garden area. Review consequences for not meeting expectations.
- Review activity: We are all going to be our own plant scientists now. Each student will find one or two plants to discover. For each plant, students must: 1) take a mental snapshot of the plant; 2) come up with five unique describing words; 3) invent a name for the plant. (If students have their journals with them, they may draw the plant and write their describing words as well as the plant’s name in their journal. Otherwise, this can be done after class is finished.)
- Let students explore the garden independently. Check-in on students who may need extra help to stay on focus. Be available for students’ questions.

### Part 3: Wrap Up

- Announce as time for independent movement is coming to an end, and have students regroup in the garden classroom.
- Call on students to share their five unique describing words. Try to guess which plant they are describing based on their describing words. (If they’ve come up with good words, you should be able to do this, but you may need to ask some clarifying questions before you guess). After you’ve guessed, ask the student to share their name for the plant. Give a few students an opportunity to share.

**Note:** For older students, coming up with ‘describing words’ may be a simple activity. Instead, have the students write descriptive phrases or sentences. Challenge them to describe the plant in a unique way, so that someone could hear the description and know exactly what plant they are describing.

# Identifying Plants in the Garden

Food & Technology

## ENGAGE

Today we are going to practice being plant scientists. All good plant scientists and all good gardeners have to be able to identify the plants in their garden. The first step in learning how to identify your plants is to know how to describe them.

A good scientist knows many “describing words” or “adjectives”. What are some examples of describing words (to describe color, shape, or size)?

## Objectives

- Students will understand what is an adjective (or describing word) and be able to come up with some describing words on their own.
- Students will improve their ability to identify plants based on appearance.
- Students will demonstrate the ability to learn independently in the garden.

## EXPLAIN

### Plant Identification

Every plant is different. Some plants are edible, others are poisonous, and others can be used for medicine. Some plants are only edible if you eat the right part or if you prepare them in the right way. This is why it can be very important to be able to identify plants in the garden. (Not to mention that, when weeding, you wouldn't want to pull out all your tomato plants, nor would you want to include tomato leaves in your next fresh salad.)

The primary way botanists identify plants is by observing the flower (its shape, number of petals, etc.), but there are many other details one can use to identify a plant: What is the shape of the leaf? What shade of green is it? In what pattern do the leaves connect to the stem? Is the plant low and bushy or straight and tall? How big is the plant? What does it smell like?

The more time you spend observing and describing the plants around you, the more you will get to know them. Eventually, you won't have to think twice before you can identify some of your favorite plants. In the meantime, using a simple plant identification guidebook can be a helpful place to start.

## ADDITIONAL CONTENT INTEGRATION *(see previous page)*

**Plant Press:** Plant scientists also take specimens of the species they discover in the field. They do this using a plant press. A simple plant press can be constructed using heavy books or boards and some rope or bungee cables. As part of a future activity, students can collect plant specimens from the garden, and lay them flat in between some sheets of newsprint. Place the newsprint between two pieces of cardboard and stack the various plant specimens in the press. By using the rope or bungee cables to pull the press tight, and by taking advantage of gravity through the weight of the boards, the press will squeeze moisture out of the plants. Let the press sit in a cool, dry place for a couple of days, or up to a week, until the plant specimens are completely dry. At this time, students can add their plant specimens to their journal, use them for crafts, or take them home.

### Additional Materials

- Two or more heavy books or boards.
- Rope or bungee cables.
- Newspaper
- Cardboard
- Scissors

## EVALUATE

**Journal prompt:** Why is it important to be able to identify plants in the garden? Name one plant you can now identify that you could not identify before today's class.