



Even a vegetable patch can be a very special place like this one at Durweston VA Primary.

Thanks particularly to the following schools for their inspiration:

- Beechcroft St Paul's VA Primary, Weymouth
- Cerne Abbas VC First
- Durweston VA Primary
- Great Bedwyn VC Primary
- Hampreston VA Primary
- Piddle Valley VA First
- Powerstock VA Primary
- St Mary the Virgin VA Primary, Gillingham
- St Andrew's VA Primary, Fontmell Magna
- Thornford VA Primary
- St Andrew's VA Primary, Preston, Weymouth
- Wool VA First School



Beechcroft St Paul's VA Primary, Weymouth



Useful contacts / further information

Books:

'Understanding Children Understanding God', Ronni Lamont, 2008
 'Stilling', Michael Beesley, SDBE 2003
 'Sacred Space Sacred Place', Barnabas 2009 in partnership with Churches together in Cornwall and Cornwall Sacre.
 'Saving Children from our chaotic world' - *Teaching Children the Magic of Silence and Stillness, 2003, Maggie Dent*

Creating a Multi-sensory Spiritual Garden in your school by Shahne Vickery, Jumping Fish Publications

Websites:

www.salisbury.anglican.org
www.creativespirituality.org.uk
www.stapleford-centre.org

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Spiritual Gardens A brief guide



Key questions for church schools are:

- Are there opportunities for spiritual development of pupils and adults?
- What are the consequences of this for the learner and staff and the wider community?
- How does the school's environment support this?
- How is the distinctive nature of our school reflected in the curriculum?
- How does it permeate other aspects of school life?
- Is practice founded on Christian Values and are these explicit?

Spiritual Gardens can contribute towards the answers to these questions and this brief guide is to help you get started.

What is a Spiritual Garden?

The spiritual garden is a place where children and adults can sit quietly and enjoy the peace and calm of natural surroundings.

The garden may contain a range of features representing elements that are important to the community using it. There may be a wonderful array of plants which stimulate the senses with their bright colours, fragrance and textures; the soothing sounds of a wind chime; a beautiful bird bath; a cross or Christian symbol that reflect the foundation of the school; stepping stones and paved areas; fountain or water feature as a reminder of Jesus as the 'Water of Life'; seats, benches, raised timber planting beds, and lighting. Natural stone may suggest silence and strength, the wooden features and trees provide a sense of warmth and shelter.



The list goes on and is limited only by the imagination.

If space allows a maze or labyrinth might be considered. There are no set rules. Gardens may be any size or shape and will be dependent upon the particular context of the school. For example,

some schools have made use of a quadrangle in the centre of the building to establish a quiet, reflective area. In addition to the suggestions above, it may be that a new school is able to incorporate an architectural feature of the previous building such as a bell. Willow sculptures, gazebos and so on may also form part of the garden. Whatever is included should contribute to the feeling of a special sacred space.



Great Bedwyn VC Primary

Why Have a Spiritual Garden?

Spirituality is an area of children's development which is easily overlooked in the hustle and bustle of today's busy world. Gardens are just one way of providing children and adults with opportunities for spiritual development.. A project to establish a spiritual garden can be a very exciting process, involving all interested parties.

Incidentally, the connection between good results in the curriculum and high standards in SMSC development is widely acknowledged and is evident in a significant number of OFSTED reports.

What do we mean by 'Spirituality'?

The Stapleford Centre, Nottingham, has done some very helpful work looking at spirituality through the concepts of windows, mirrors and doors:

WINDOWS: giving children opportunities to become *aware* of the world in new ways; to *wonder* about life's 'WOWs' (things that are amazing) and 'OWs' (things that bring us up short). In this children are learning *about* life in all its fullness.

MIRRORS: giving children opportunities to *reflect* on their experiences; to *meditate* on life's big questions and to consider some possible answers. In this they are learning *from* life by exploring their own insights and perspectives and those of others.

DOORS: giving children opportunities to *respond* to all of this; to **do** something creative as a means of expressing, applying and further developing their thoughts and convictions. In this they are learning to *live* by putting into action what they are coming to believe and value.



St George's, VA Primary, Bourton

How might we begin?

It is important to involve as wide a range of stakeholders as is practicable in the planning and ideas for the garden. Ensure that everyone understands the rationale behind the project and the benefits that will ensue. Many people can be involved in the creation, for example, by designing, planting, landscaping, building structures, laying a patio, donating plants and lots more.

Some tips to bear in mind:

- Do some research and find examples of existing gardens. This can stimulate ideas to get you started—it can be rather daunting when faced with a blank sheet of paper.
- Begin the actual design process by discussing and sketching lots of ideas—everyone who wants to can have a go. In one school, children and parents built models of their garden designs which made a fabulous display.
- Select a working party team of 'experts' to collate designs and draw up a final plan for implementation.
- Make garden spot plan layouts on graph paper to scale. Use a measuring tape to check the sizes to help capture the scale of each element..
- Provide sufficient notes on plantings of trees, bushes, and other landscaping features. You will need to consider future maintenance and development of your garden.

Finally, don't be afraid to 'phone a friend'. Schools who have been through a similar process will be only too pleased to share their expertise.



Hampreston VA First