

Circle Gardening
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**“What was Paradise?
but a garden
an orchard of trees
and herbs, full of
pleasure, and nothing
there but delights.**

William Lawson

A kindergarten needs a children’s garden, one where the children can freely enter and enjoy the spaces with easy access to the plants. At the Little Yarra Steiner Kindergarten we have a circle garden. Seven circles within the form of a large circle. Pathways are heavily mulched to reduce weed growth and to define their borders.

The center circle is bordered by the children’s favorite - strawberries. In the center of the strawberry ring stands a beautiful pink rose with garlic planted around its stem. The rose being the Queen and the garlic being the King of the garden world.

Children love to run through the garden and round and round. With their feet on the pathway, their little arms can reach into the circle to pick a strawberry or to pull a carrot. You can begin a circle garden with just one circle adding a second and third whenever you can. The circle garden allows many hands to work together, when planting, weeding or harvesting. The children and teacher are able to work together in a ring. The children follow the teacher with their feet on the path and their hands out-stretched into the circle garden bed.

The call of the winter garden is but a whisper, and there is little we can do outdoors in the coldest months. As the cold contractive forces pull all the above energies deep down below the soil into the earth, we can work with these forces in the late Autumn and Winter. This is a wonderful time to prepare for a Spring garden.

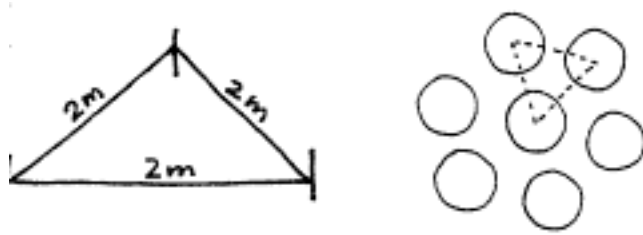
If you would like to start a garden, and the area you have chosen is covered in weeds, or is indeed part of a lawn, and weeding and digging are simply not your way of starting a garden, then mulching the garden area over Autumn and Winter is a wonderfully easy way to start your garden.

Choose a good sunny spot, stand where you feel the center of your garden should be, push a stick into the ground to mark the center. For a 7 circle garden you will need to mark out a 5 meter (or 5.5 yards; 1 meter = 1.1 yards) diameter circle. Cover the entire area with a blanket of whole newspapers that have been wet down, overlapping them well so that no weeds can make their way through, as any little ray of light from above will stimulate growth from below. We need to create complete darkness to encourage warm activity below, for they will do all the work for us over winter. This layer of newspaper is then secured with any other material you have access to, lawn clippings, wood chips, straw, twigs, branches, whatever. Over the winter months all of the weeds will have returned to the soil, the worms will have worked over the entire area you have covered.

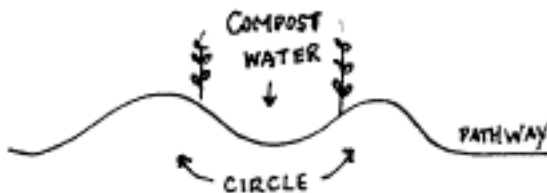
Come Spring, all you need to do, is to move the mulch layer and lift the wads of newspaper, to find beautifully activated soil, ready to shape into garden beds. Children will enjoy being part of this as well, as it is all light work.

A reverence for the soil can be shown by working with the seasonal forces, and also, by only using composted wastes, and by choosing to use tools that lift the soil, as gently as your fingers would. A good garden fork is the only tool you need, as it works like an extension of your hand. Spades cut the soil and destroy the soil's natural structure, and spades also kill precious worms. Gently fork the soil, and give the worms time to move down, out of harm's way.

Now with your circle of earth before you, it is time to mark the center of each circle. Find 3 sticks about 500 cm long and a 6 meter length of string. Tie the ends of the string together. Now at 2 meter intervals tie the sticks to the string. Mark the center circle first and stretch out the other 2 sticks and string to form a triangle. Mark these points as the center of each circle. In turn move one stick across to reform the triangle and mark the next circle. Remember not to move the center stick until all circles are marked.



Fork out the soil from this center point and scrape up the surface soil from the pathway space to form a mound of soil like a doughnut. Fill the center of the circle with compost, fork the compost into the soil and plant your seeds or seedlings on the rim of the circle.



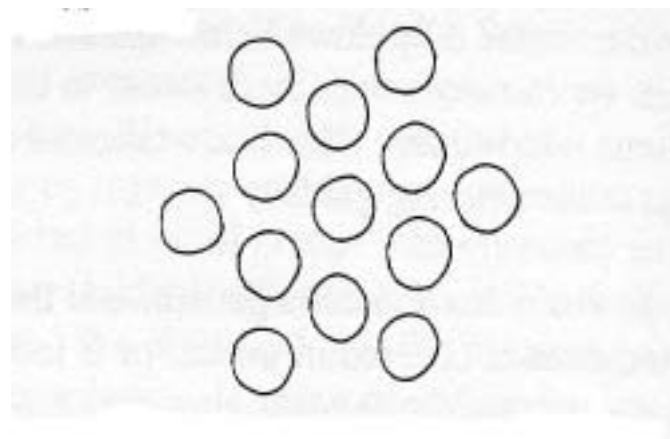
Each circle can measure up to 1 meter in diameter; however, in a children's garden it is best to have wider pathways and smaller circles of about 80 cm. For climbing plants like peas, beans, pumpkins and cucumbers, a cylinder of reinforcement wire can be placed on the rim of a circle of 5 or 6 saplings, with a hole drilled at one end and wired together to form a tent-like climbing frame. An arch of reinforcement wire or bamboo from one circle to another, with beans or pumpkins climbing over for children to walk under and harvest from below.



Once the plants are established you need only water the center of each circle and each plant is watered, so you save a lot of water in a circle garden. Growing plants in circles creates an energy system, cooperating with nature, working with the natural spin or spiraling of plants as they grow. A circle garden is beautiful and welcomes all to be among the plants.

Crops are easily rotated. For example, start with peas, then follow with lettuce, then carrots. Companion plants can be planted together like sweet corn with climbing beans or a tomato plant in the center with sweet basil plants around it. A circle 1 meter in diameter is equivalent to a 3 meter row, each end of the row. As you may have observed, plants at the end of the row never seem as healthy or happy as the ones in the middle row.

Each circle is a garden within itself and can be weeded, watered or planted within a few minutes so caring for a circle garden is simple and efficient. Pathways can be mulched or planted with ground covers like chamomile, pennyroyal, baby tears or thyme. Start with one or two circles and then to extend your garden simply continue to mark out more circles - on and on.



As you wander in and out of your circle garden, plant sits happily in the circle, none ever being at the remember - "The gardeners' footsteps fertilize the soil."

Soon to come - a publication on gardens for the kindergarten to be published by the Waldorf Early Childhood Association and the Center for Anthroposophy in New Hampshire.