GARDENING MERIT BADGE

NOTE TO COUNSELOR

Primary Safety Concerns

Gardening activities may involve working with soil, using gardening tools, wearing appropriate protective clothing, and handling fertilizers or pesticides. The Gardening merit badge includes safety considerations related to insect stings and, for Scouts who choose the beekeeping option in requirement 8, working around live honeybee hives. These activities may present risks ranging from minor injuries to severe allergic reactions or other health effects. Always follow the current Scouting America SAFE Checklist and the *Guide to Safe Scouting* when completing badge requirements.

Before Gardening Activities

Qualified Supervision

- The Gardening merit badge counselor should know the proper use of gardening tools and pesticides, and applicable local and state USDA regulations for handling bees and beekeeping equipment.

Physical Fitness

- Counselors should be aware of youth participants who may be allergic to bee stings and to pesticides and fungicides used in gardening.

- Before a Scout works with a beehive or visits a beekeeper (requirement 8(e)), confirm whether they are allergic to bee stings through a visit to an allergist or family physician. A Scout who is allergic should choose a different option under requirement 8. If a Scout brings a buddy to a beekeeper visit, that buddy should also be checked for bee sting allergies beforehand.

Safe Area or Course

- Counselors should take reasonable measures to provide participants with a safe gardening environment and, for the beekeeping option, well-constructed hives that pass USDA inspection.

Equipment Selection and Maintenance

- Counselors should ensure gardening tools and equipment are well maintained and that any hives follow USDA guidelines.

Personal Safety Equipment

- Counselors should ensure all participants wear proper protective gardening clothing and equipment—gloves, long pants, an air mask, and safety glasses—when preparing and applying chemicals. Protective gear for beekeeping includes a hat, veil, coveralls, gloves, long sleeves, pants, and other protective devices.

Applicable Laws

● Counselors teaching this merit badge must have experience with gardening tasks and tools. As a rule, Scouting activities may not include activities for youth that, by law, they would not be allowed to do in the workplace. Obey all restrictions manufacturers impose or suggest for the use of their tools or other products, or potentially hazardous chemicals such as pesticides, fungicides, and fertilizers.

Discipline

● Counselors should take reasonable measures to ensure all participants are using gardening and beekeeping tools and equipment properly.

COUNSELOR NOTE

Purpose

Help the Scout understand the science of growing plants—preparing soil, starting seeds and setting out seedlings, and caring for plants through harvest or flowering—while building an appreciation for pollinators, nutrition, and sustainable pest management. Just as important, help them build an attitude of safety-first planning before handling tools, chemicals, or, if they choose that path, live bees.

Teaching Tips

The Home Depot's Path to Pro Skills Explorers program provides video resources for leaders to use in teaching skilled trades merit badges, including electricity, painting, emergency prep, gardening, plumbing, woodwork, and others. Register today!

Home Depot - Path to Pro | Skills Explorers

● Walk Scouts through basic soil preparation and the difference between starting plants from seed versus transplanting seedlings, since requirement 2 calls for three of each, for both vegetables and flowers.

● Tie the seed germination test (requirement 4) to real gardening decisions—a Scout who tests seeds before planting can budget seed and bed space, and can explain likely causes of poor germination such as seed age, planting depth, moisture, and temperature.

● Use the nutritional-value requirement (requirement 3) to connect gardening to healthy eating, comparing root and tuber crops, vegetables that bear above ground, and fruits.

● Make pollinators concrete: Have Scouts explain how and why honeybees pollinate food crops, discuss pressures on bee populations such as habitat loss, disease, and pesticide exposure, and talk through what the loss of pollinators would mean for the food supply (requirement 6).

● Make pest identification hands-on (requirement 7)—have Scouts identify real pests or diseased plants in a garden and require at least one organic control method alongside a conventional one for each.

● For requirement 8, help the Scout choose a 90-day (or harvest-length) project that fits their interest, space, and resources—a compost bin, a vermicompost bin, a hydroponic garden, a water

garden, preparing a honey super, or a garden of their own—and set up a simple weekly observation log from day one.

- Encourage the visit to a county extension office, nursery, farm, or botanical garden (requirement 5) early in the process; it often shapes what the Scout chooses to grow and connects them with a real gardener or horticulturist.

- For requirement 9, help the Scout see gardening as both a possible career path (horticulture, landscape design, extension work) and a lifelong hobby, not just a one-time project.

Helpful Resources

- Gardening Merit Badge pamphlet
- Current Gardening requirements
- Scouting America Guide to Safe Scouting
- Scouting America SAFE Checklist
- SAFE Project Tool Use
- USDA Cooperative Extension System (find a local office)
- Pollinator Partnership