

Throw a Garden Birthday Party

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Youth Gardening

What better way to celebrate your child's spring or summer birthday than with a garden party? Although fancy dresses and tea sandwiches may come to mind, kids love to run around outside, play games and get their hands into the dirt-- all fun activities to keep them engaged and maybe even learn a little about the wonders of plants and seeds. Here are ideas for invitations, decorations, activities, refreshments and favors that will make your child's big day a memorable one.



Invitations

Gather up old gardening magazines and seed catalogs, purchase plant-related stickers or print out garden images from the internet. Next give the children glue sticks, scissors and construction paper and let creativity take flight. Encourage them to create colorful designs using clipped pictures of vegetables, fruits and flowers on the front of the paper, then add the party details on the back. For a girl's birthday you might say "Roses are red, violets are blue, (child's name) is turning (age) and wants to invite you ... to her Garden Birthday Party!" For a young boy, you might change it to "Red are tomatoes, green is my thumb, it's (child's name) (age) birthday, I hope you'll come!"

Decorations

The decoration possibilities are almost endless. If the birthday falls in summertime, decorate with bunches of flowers from your garden or bowls mounded with colorful fresh vegetables. If it's too early to pick your own, a trip to the dollar store might yield plastic fruits, vegetables and flowers for very little cost.

Tie multi-colored helium-filled balloons into bunches, and tape a ring of green construction paper "leaves" around the bottom to make floating bouquets. For fall birthdays, a sheaf of cornstalks and a pile of pumpkins can set a harvest theme.

Set the table with a flowered tablecloth or perhaps a red and white checked one.

Planting Activity

Decorate a Flower Pot: Purchase a 4-inch clay pot for each child along with some craft paints and inexpensive brushes. Have a supply of old shirts on hand to use as smocks (or ask each child to bring one from home). Let the kids decorate the pots, then set them aside to dry while games are played and refreshments are served.

Pop In a Plant: Once the pots are dry, let each child pot up a flower or vegetable seedling to take home. If it's spring, you might have marigolds or pansies to plant. Or you might have tomato or pepper seedlings that could be transferred to a garden at home. At other times of the year you might purchase small, easy-to-grow houseplants such as spider plants or African violets.

Plant Some Seeds: If plants are not available, planting seeds is another option. Waiting for a seed to push through the soil is an exciting prospect for children, especially if it's one he or she has planted. Choose large seeds that are easy to handle, such as pumpkins, beans or zinnias.

Games

Kids like to move and a relay race will help them burn off some energy. Hold a watering can relay, asking children to use a small plastic watering can to ferry water from one bucket to fill another. If you remember to tell the guests not to arrive in "party" clothes, you can hold a "dirt" relay-- what kid wouldn't love that! Using a small shovel or trowel, the children can transfer a heap of soil from a pile to a bucket-- the team that's first to fill theirs is the winner.

A garden treasure hunt will also generate excitement. Hide plastic fruits and vegetables around the yard for eager seekers to discover. Or get some plastic insects and have a bug hunt!

The younger set might enjoy a round of pin the bee on the flower (or perhaps the tomato hornworm on the tomato!). And if a little bit of quiet time is desired, why not settle things down by reading aloud the inspiring and wonderfully illustrated children's book, *Miss Rumphius*, by Barbara Cooney. It tells the story of a woman who, to fulfill her grandfather's directive to make the world a more beautiful place, decides to do so by planting lupine seeds wherever she goes, so that all can enjoy these beautiful flowers.

Refreshments

Instead of a birthday cake, make individual cupcakes. Decorate them to look like flower blossoms – sunflowers, daisies and roses.

Serve a platter of fresh vegetables and dip. Cut radishes into roses. Use a cookie cutter to cut cucumber and pepper slices into flower shapes.

Eat 'dirt'! Purchase some 4-inch plastic flower pots and wash them well. Insert a paper cup filled with chocolate pudding inside each pot. Crumble some chocolate sandwich cookies across the surface, stick a plastic flower into the "dirt" and have some Gummi Worms peeking out. Kids will love it!

Favors

Of course, it's not a party without some treats to take home. Send children off with packets of seeds, kid-size garden gloves, small watering cans, sheets of flower stickers, Gummi Worms-- and, perhaps, a little nibble from the gardening bug.