

Gardening With Children

It's an investment that reaps many dividends! Our future depends on children as much as their future depends on us. It's never too early to teach a child how to garden. The clue to making gardening with your child a success is to make it fun for both of you.

The size and complexity of the garden will depend on the age and size of the child. Do not make it so big that it cannot be easily planted and cared for. Help the child prepare their garden by spading and raking until smooth. Realize that you will probably be doing most of this preparation work but do not exclude the child. It is important for them to feel this special plot belongs to them. If possible, have tools that are child-sized. Small shovels and rakes are as much an encouragement to gardening as choosing which plants they wish to grow. Help pick out the seeds or plants through suggestion and advice, but let the final decision be the child's. Suggest plants that are easy to grow and care for.

Zoo gardens are fun and easy to create. You could have Lamb's Ears, Beebalm, Cardinal Flower, Hen & Chicks, Catnip, Monkeygrass, Tiger Lily, Elephant Garlic, Butterfly Weed, Birdsfoot Violet or Coltsfoot to name a few.

Another fun one is a **Pet's garden** for children. Grow garlic and pennyroyal to prevent fleas; salad burnet and parsley to feed guinea pigs, rabbits, canaries and hamsters; mint, catnip and garlic to use in baking home-made pet treats; sunflowers for indoor and outdoor birds and for roasting to eat as snacks; corn for drying and feeding to squirrels and guinea pigs; and birdhouse gourds for

making bird houses for finches and wrens.

Gardening is a time to learn about how plants grow, how they are beneficial to us, where certain varieties come from, etc. Literature and history can also become a part of the garden learning experience. Tell them about the *War of the Roses*, the Fairies that live in the Thyme in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, *The Scarlet Pimpernel* and the *Potato Famine* in Ireland.

Time spent gardening together can be fun and relaxing, it can teach children about nature, life, responsibility and work ethics – all of which can be very valuable assets for the future.

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