

Children in the Garden

A few tips, tricks, and “kid tested, Master Gardener Mom approved” ways to have and keep children involved in gardening.



Ask anyone who has worked with children in a garden and you will find that keeping little hands busy in the right ways and the right times is a challenge.

So, how do you keep them from bulldozing the plants and to stay interested from spring planting to fall harvest?

Be Realistic

Children have a boundless desire to help, seemingly endless energy, and generally short attention spans. That exuberance can translate to an excellent opportunity to teach children about where food comes from. The short attention span can be a challenging force of nature that may, or may not, help your child pay attention to given instructions. Not everything will go according to plan, and that is O.K.

Getting Everyone Involved

Ask everyone in the household their favorite fruits and vegetables and why. (There are no wrong answers! “It’s PINK” is a perfect response as to why a little girl might like a cherry tomato.)

Use seed catalogs, seed packet displays, or trips to a greenhouse as a chance to talk about which plants look like fun and let everyone pick something to grow!

Another idea is to supply child sized garden tools. A child friendly trowel, rake, and watering can, will go a long way in keeping “grown-up”.

Making the Best Choices

Talk with your little gardeners about what is best for your garden. Help them understand that certain seeds and plants may be better suited to some environments than others; an apple sapling may not be the best choice for container gardening on an apartment balcony.

Make selections based on what you will eat. If no one eats radishes, don’t plant them. Look for varieties that are easy for little fingers to reach: cherry tomatoes, sugar snap peas, pole or bush beans, lettuce, or herbs are a few examples. Several of these are well suited for container gardening.

Select plants that will keep the garden active from spring to fall. These are just a few examples:

- Spring/Early Summer – peas, strawberries
- Summer – cucumbers, beans
- Fall – sweet corn, carrots

Most importantly, make selections that children can relate to: a small size for easy snacking, a favorite color, or a name in common.

Child-Tested, Mom-Approved

Lettuce: Sweet Repeat blend - red and green leaves. *

Carrot: Dragon-purple. Rainbow Hybrid - white, orange, coral. * ^

Cucumber: Miniature White - white. (Makes great pickles!) *

Squash: Pool Ball Hybrid blend-small zucchini hybrids - white, yellow.

Snap Pea: Super Sugar - green. *

Bean: Kentucky Blue-pole/climbing variety-an almost blue - green color.

Peppers: Bell varieties-green, orange. Carmen – a deep red. ^

Tomatoes: Litt'l Bites-orange-red * ^ - Chocolate Cherry-a red-brown.

Strawberries: a mix of June and Everbearing.

*Container friendly.

^ A family favorite.

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