

Growing a Green Generation is Easy

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Lots of articles start with what to grow and how to design a kids' garden, but this one is about taking advantage of "gardening moments" with your kids, whether it is in your backyard ... around a containeror at the windowsill with a few herb plants.



So what are the opportunities and what are the garden-building basics that you need to know?

Here is a basic guide that is based on a child's age. It should help you understand what kinds of gardening activities you could expect your child to succeed at. Children take to gardens in different ways depending on their ages and personality.

Ages 3-4: Don't expect perfection because, gardening is supposed to be fun and a bit dirty. Catch bugs, pull a few weeds, and blow the fuzz off dandelions. If a child wants to plant last night's desert —like watermelon seeds, then do just that!

Even in the garden, remember that pre-schoolers are never safe if left alone. Let

kids take the lead, while you supply the background information. It's in the storytelling that kids learn about gardening and the world. Keep in mind that you do not need to know all of the answers. That is what library trips are for.

Age 5: "All the world's a stage" for children at this age, who are learning how to play with others. Gardens are a great place for kids to act out dramas by building forts, secret hide-a-ways, or small gardens where they can play and learn.

Continue to let kids take the lead. If your child sees a hollow stump as a possible troll house, join him in inspecting it. Help him gather the supplies he needs to make the project happen, but only help out where needed.

Children at this age have the attention span and dexterity to be left alone, yet still within a parent's sight, to create their own worlds. Don't fuss about how those little Eden's turn out. Remember the world was a messy place during its creation.

Ages 6-7: At this age and stage your child's reading and math skills add to the gardening fun. Now a child can make plant markers, read seed packets, look through catalogs, and even pay for plants. They're still wide-eyed and open to nature's mysteries at this age.

However, for children this age, the "doing" is more important than the result. For them, a garden is a collection of plants of all sorts of shapes, sizes, and colors. A bouquet is whatever fits in their hand!

Ages 8-9: The emphasis now shifts from doing.... to doing well. Your children can design a garden on graph paper, thinking about flower heights and colors or how much space tomato plants will need. They can translate that drawing to a real garden.



Their ability to use tools increases; they can build fences. It's never too early, but now is an especially wonderful time to enter your vegetables and bouquets in at the county fair or join a community garden, CSA, or 4-H. These activities combine gardening with friendships and social skills.

Just keep in mind that kids love to dig in the dirt, so why fight it? Get them out there gardening, where they can have fun and learn at the same time.

Gardening is a great way to teach lessons such as environmental awareness, the workings of nature, and have some good old-fashioned fun. It's enough to hope your child will grow up to enjoy gardening, but who knows, you may have a budding botanist in the family.

Breakfast Fruit Wrap

1 tortilla, preferably whole wheat
2 tsp. "fruit only" strawberry preserves
2 Tbsp. reduced fat ricotta cheese
¼ cup sliced fresh strawberries
1 Tbsp. sliced almonds, toasted

Spread preserves on tortilla. Top with ricotta cheese. Top with sliced fruit. Sprinkle with sliced almonds. Starting from one end, roll tightly. Wrap in foil for neater eating. Makes 1 fruit wrap. Variation: Spread tortilla with apricot preserves and use sliced fresh or canned, well-drained peaches.



Per serving: 231 calories, 9 g fat (2 g saturated fat), 34 g carbohydrate, 9 g protein, 4 g dietary fiber, 213 mg sodium

Source: *American Institute for Cancer Research*

Active Kids

Gardening a great way for kids to learn about nature and the environment. It also provides great opportunities for children to be active. Minute for minute, gardening burns almost as many calories as low impact aerobics. Spring is a great time to get the whole family outside helping in the garden. Encourage children to plant vegetables, flowers or herbs. Teach kids which plants are weeds, and then put them in charge of pulling any that they find. What better way for children to learn and be active at the same time? Take an

occasional break from gardening to play an outdoor game. This will allow children to be more focused when they return to the garden.



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