

## IN THE GARDEN

### GARDENING WITH CHILDREN OF ALL AGES

There is nothing more delightful for a child than planting a seed and watching it grow into something beautiful or something to eat. Gardening is one of those timeless activities that all ages of children can enjoy together. Your children will need very little persuasion to come play in the dirt. You'll find them eagerly lined up and ready to go if you follow these simple ideas.

#### **Make Gardening Child Friendly**

To make gardening easier and more appealing to young children, be sure to offer them child-size tools. A three-year-old will become frustrated in trying to manage an adult-size watering can. Watch his confidence and interest in gardening soar when he's given a watering can just his size. This same idea applies to gardening gloves, trowels, and wheelbarrows, too.

In addition to offering appropriate tools, you'll want to plan gardening activities that are appropriate to the children's age and developmental skills. Three and four-year-olds love digging in the dirt, putting plants and seeds in the ground, and watering growing plants. School-age children, on the other hand, will enjoy planning what will go into the garden and harvesting the fruits, vegetables, and flowers. They can also help in maintaining the garden by removing weeds. As you engage in these activities, remember that gardening is a wonderful opportunity to incorporate science and math skills. Children will need to measure the rows, learn about composting, and make sure plants have the proper sun and nutrients.

#### **Choose Plants That Grow Easily**

To make your school garden successful, you will want to choose seeds that are easy for young children to plant. Pumpkins, green beans, sunflowers, and peas are nice big seeds appropriate for preschoolers.

Quick growing vegetables and flowers also make appropriate choices in school gardens. Young children like to see results quickly. They'll ask if they can pick the vegetables and fruits the day after planting! Radishes, peas, green beans, lettuce, baby carrots, and sunflowers all make excellent choices because they grow very quickly. For quick results in the flowerbed, purchase seedlings from a nursery. Flats of flowers and veggies produce results children can see right away.

## Pick a Theme

If you really want your children to get into gardening, pick a theme for your garden. Try one of the following suggestions or come up your own. The possibilities are endless!

- **Pizza Garden** – Everything you need to make a pizza can be grown in a garden: Roma tomatoes, green peppers, jalapeno peppers, oregano, basil, green onions, parsley, and chives.
- **Scented Herb Garden** – Basil, lemon thyme, mint, scented geraniums, dill, and lavender make a wonderfully scented garden.
- **Petting Zoo** – This garden will include plants that are fun to touch, such as Sea Pink, Lamb's Ear, and mint.
- **Peter Rabbit's Garden** – Beets, radishes, mint, lemon balm, lavender, chamomile, hyssop, sage, rosemary, and strawberries are all featured plants in the classic story.
- **Fourth of July Garden** – Show your patriotic spirit with a garden filled with red, white, and blue flowers.
- **Animal Garden** – This type of garden features with animal names: pussy willow, dogwood, cowslip, horse daisy, tiger lily, Lamb's Ear, spider plant, snapdragon, and catnip.
- **Sensory Garden** – Plant a garden that includes things that involve all five senses: Lamb's Ear for touch, lavender for scent, basil for taste, poppy for eyes (bright colors), and snapdragons for the ear to hear.

## Conclusion

No matter what you and your children decide to grow, it's the fun and excitement of making something special that you'll enjoy the most. Whether you plant cherry tomatoes in window box or prize-winning marigolds in a flower bed – the learning you share with the children will blossom into something that will endure after the last plant has been picked.