

# Teach Your Children

## How To Garden (and watch them bloom)

By John Bruce

Typically, people are introduced to gardening by their parents or grandparents. The best thing that a gardener can do is to mentor and teach a kid the benefits of gardening. A little patience and imagination go a long way toward instilling a lifelong interest in gardening in children. Kids usually love it, and it helps them become responsible.

It helps to have a short handled shovel, rake, trowel, a small watering can and a small wheelbarrow. Keep a camera close by to help in the process of creating long-lasting memories.

Keeping the garden fun is a must. To avoid frustration, give a child his or her own garden plot. It's a good idea to start out small. You can create a child's garden plot by building a 4-foot-by-4-foot or 3-foot-by-6-foot raised bed enclosed by timbers in a sunny spot near a source of water. Invest in some seasoned manure or compost if you don't have any on hand.

A simple alternative is to garden in pots and containers anywhere there's sun. But remember, containers dry out much more quickly than garden plots so container plants are dependent on regular, daily care.

Recommended vegetables for young gardeners include beans, sunflowers, radishes and cherry tomatoes. Start plants from seed indoors using recyclable containers like egg cartons, and watch as the child becomes fascinated by the growth. If you want faster results, buy garden vegetable and flower seedlings to plant.

You can spice up your child's adventure by planting veggies of unusual colors or sizes. Try Purple Queen, a bush bean that doesn't require support. The Easter Egg radish matures in a rainbow of red, purple and white in 30 days. Mammoth sunflowers grow up to 12 feet tall with huge flowers and edible seeds.

One idea is to create a visible imagination station for your child. Planting four tall-growing sunflowers in the corners of a 4-foot square. Plant morning glory seeds around each sunflower when they're about a foot tall. Let the vines climb the stalks. When the sunflowers reach about 5 or 6 feet, tie a "net" of strings between them on three sides and across the top. Tend the vines so they grow on the strings and create the walls of a room.

Let your child select what seeds or seedling to plant, and help the child keep a journal on growth. Record-keeping and organization are also important lessons to learn.

### BOOKS & WEB SITES

"Gardening with Children" by Monika Hanneman, Patricia Hulse, Brian Johnson, Barbara Kurland and Tracey Patterson and illustrated by Sam Tomasello, published in 2007 by Brooklyn Botanic Garden, helps parents, teachers and community gardeners introduce gardening to kids.

"A Child's Garden: 60 Ideas to Make Any Garden Come Alive for Children" by Molly Dannenmaier and published in 2008 by Archetype Press Books is a guide for parents wishing to create natural spaces in the garden where children can play and explore.

The National Gardening Association offers programs, courses, grants and other resources for schools and parents on [www.kidsgardening.com](http://www.kidsgardening.com).

Renee's Garden supports children's gardening programs through the National Gardening Association. Renee's donates leftover and returned seeds to encourage school garden projects all over the country, [www.reneesgarden.com](http://www.reneesgarden.com). 

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