

Tips for Gardening with Kids

- 1. Planning the Garden:** Involve the kids in all steps of the planning from garden location, name, design, soil preparation and crop list. Adults need to facilitate and show how, but not do everything. Enjoy the process and be open to the surprises you may encounter.
- 2. Kid-Friendly Garden:** The garden should be kid-friendly. Make wide paths to walk in with rows about 4 feet wide or raised beds. When planning, design kid friendly spaces like sunflower houses, bean teepees or flower tunnels. Plants should be fun to eat, smell, and look at or have an interesting feature. If you are planning for a school, plant fall ready crops that don't take much work in the summer like squash, carrots, and beets. Giant sunflowers grow fast and provide food for birds and people. Favorite kid vegetables to eat right out of the garden are orange and yellow cherry tomatoes, baby carrots, radishes, peas and cucumbers. Children are much more willing to try and consume fresh fruits and vegetables that they have grown.
- 3. Gardening Tools:** Supply real tools for little hands. Invest in kid sized tools, such as hoes, rakes and watering cans, for the garden and have enough to allow small teams to work together on a task. This will allow them to feel more ownership of the garden. Children need the responsibilities of caring for the garden. Consider rotating job so each child has a new task every week.
- 4. Exploring Nature:** This requires hands-on interaction with soil, plants and water. Listen, smell and watch, let them use all their senses to experience the world around them. Explain when it is okay to touch or taste and when to check with an adult first. Make sure children have the right clothing and shoes, and don't be afraid to let them get dirty.
- 5. Boundaries of Garden:** Kids that haven't worked in a garden before have to be taught the basics, such as to where they can and cannot walk, that stakes have to be left in the ground, and how to be safe with tools. Talk about the responsibilities of gardening and while it's fun to have a garden, it's also work that everyone shares together.
- 6. Balance Structure:** Strike a balance between structured of activities and unstructured time, this will allow the kids to follow their own curiosity in the garden. Starting the day with a story, a snack and a garden activity. Storytelling, painting, and dancing will help the kids get away from their day-to-day routine.
- 7. Teachable Moments:** Be ready at any moment to explore the unexpected questions of a child and their natural curiosity in the garden. Take time to examine interesting bugs, or to inspect different vegetables, flowers or weeds. The best activities grow out of the needs, interests, and question of the children themselves.
- 8. Community Events:** Opportunities for children to take pride in the fruits of their labors and to share their experiences with family and friends are important part of a garden. Get the kids involved in making something tangible with something harvested from the garden. Spaghetti dinner herb packets, roasted sunflower seeds, flower bouquets, and salsa are just a few ideas.