

Gardening for Children



good idea. The plants will need watering and nurturing which will keep the child occupied until the seeds start to grow. Buy good quality seeds and follow the instructions on the packet.

With flowers, sunflowers are a great choice for children as they grow so quickly and are especially flamboyant. Some species grow almost 30cm in a week which keeps everyone interested. You can have competitions to see who can grow the tallest plant. Plant one seed per pot and keep them on a windowsill until they are large enough to place

outside. You will need to stake the tall varieties to prevent them from falling over.

Even if you don't have a garden there are plenty of plants that can be grown on a patio or in a window box. Container gardening can be very successful and even fruit and vegetables can be planted in them. The main thing to remember with container gardening is to keep the plants well watered and well fed.

You may wish to purchase purpose-made containers such as potato barrels which are tall and narrow with sliding sides near the base to make harvesting your crop easy. Another good choice is a ready-seeded growbag for tomatoes which you will need to water every day and feed daily with tomato fertiliser once flowers appear. You can even grow tomatoes in a hanging basket and there are particular varieties suitable for this.

Alternatively, you can use standard containers and select your seeds to suit. For example, if you wish to grow carrots, choose the species to fit the size of your tub: if you've got deep pots you can go for a long carrot, however if your containers are shallower then select a seed that produces a smaller, almost spherical carrot.

When it comes to gardening with children, let them do as much as possible independently and keep it fun. You may well discover that you have planted the seed for a lifetime of pleasure in the fresh air with some exercise thrown in for good measure.

There is no greater joy than seeing your children enjoying themselves in the fresh air and away from the TV or computer games. And to encourage this, gardening is a fantastic and rewarding hobby, which, once instilled, will become a pleasure for the rest of their lives.

If you can, hand over a small plot of the garden to your child. Delineate the border however you wish, but having total ownership of this patch of land will mean a great deal to the youngster. Do make sure the plot is in a sunny area, otherwise nothing will grow and they will soon become disillusioned with gardening.

Children of all ages can do something in the garden. Very small children love 'preparing' soil and watering everything in sight. Give a toddler an old spoon and they will happily spend time digging holes and playing with worms. Add a small watering can and they will be happy for hours. Making mud pies is the first stage in discovering the gardening bug!

With older children, browse through some plant and seed catalogues together to get some ideas before taking a trip to a garden centre. Vegetables and fruit are always a good choice for children of any age as results are spectacular and tangible. A child is more likely to eat vegetables they have grown themselves. Some good varieties to start with are strawberries, tomatoes, carrots, lettuces, radishes, beetroot and, if you have the space, pumpkins.

Most children want to see a result fairly quickly as their attention span is quite short, so a mixture of seeds and ready grown plants is a