

Gardening with Kids



Through gardening children learn responsibility, self confidence, creativity, cooperation, reasoning and discovery. They gain an appreciation of their natural environment and an understanding of patterns and life cycles. Gardening can create a platform for maths, science and art as well as establishing a respect for growing your own produce and valuing where your food comes from. Whether it's growing on the windowsill, pots or hanging baskets on the veranda, in the garden bed or veggie plot, it's a great way to share time with kids!

The key to success is to keep it fun and facilitate the experience for the children instead of leading. Children love playing in dirt, digging and exploring their environment through all their senses. Start with short bursts of activity to match their attention spans, dependent on age – don't expect them to weed for hours! Give them their own space in the garden so that they have some ownership of it and try not to overly correct what they do if it doesn't match up to your expectations. Remember the gardening is for them and they will learn from their own endeavours.

Engage children with the concept of 'seed to table'. A great example is a *Pizza plot* where they can grow basil, tomatoes and garlic together in a small space and use them to make their own pizzas. There is no better way to encourage kids to get their daily serves of fruit and veg than showing them where it comes from and how delicious it tastes when home-grown and harvested.

Start simple

Take a look at where you live and the micro-climate in your garden. Note where the prevailing winds come from; which areas get the most sunshine; areas with good soil drainage; identify problematic roots etc and you can then plant accordingly. Prepare your soil, including lots of compost and well broken down manure – see our [Compost Tips](#). Don't forget to mulch after planting to save water and help keep the weeds down. Straw and bark are ideal.

It's a great idea to start a [Garden Diary](#) or [Scrap Book](#)– you can jot down ideas; plot and check your progress; look at when to sow/harvest fruit, veggies and herbs; monitor success for solutions to pests and keep a record of your projects with drawings, sketches, photographs and pressed cuttings.

Check out local planting guides on the understorey network website: <http://www.understorey-network.org.au/municipalities.html>

Use proper tools - it's a false economy buying cheap plastic tools that break easily and dampen enthusiasm. You can shorten handles on longer tools and show kids how to maintain and fix them.

For more great ideas:



Sustainable Gardening Australia www.sgaonline.org.au

Gardening with Kids www.thekidsgarden.co.uk & www.kidsgardening.org

Clarence City Council (excellent water wise tip sheet) www.ccc.tas.gov.au

Activities

There are so many ways that children can share in the gardening experience:



- ✓ **Watering**
- ✓ **Digging**
- ✓ **Harvesting**
- ✓ **Planting**
- ✓ **Cooking**
- ✓ **Craft activities**
- ✓ **Weeding**
- ✓ **Potting**
- ✓ **Composting, recycling and mulching**

Recycle

Gardening doesn't have to be expensive and in the long run can save you lots of money on your shopping bills, keep you fit and active with your children and provide scrumptious healthy fresh food. Local tip shops, recycling centres and bits and bobs around the house can help you get started on a shoe-string budget.

- You can create your own biodegradable plant pots from newspaper or toilet roll tubes. Plant them straight into the earth and the 'container' will compost into the ground improving the soil to boot! Egg cartons make great seed trays that also biodegrade 😊
- Make little propagation houses from clear plastic punnets with lids or plant protectors from plastic milk containers.
- Use unusual and quirky containers: teapots, old boots, wheel barrows, chimney pots.
- Re-use the sandpit box and convert to a garden bed if your child has grown out of it.
- Hang old cd's on strings to deter birds from your veggie patch.
- Old baths, packing cases and tyres of all sizes can all be used to create easy access raised beds. You could also make worm farms out of them using an old door for a lid.
- Organise seed or produce swaps with friends, neighbours or community groups.



Get Creative



Grow your own playhouse and make a tepee with plants or a bean wigwam.

If you have the space, make a maze from sunflowers.

Use flowers or seeds to make crowns and necklaces, or create natural dyes.

Make signs and plant labels for your garden and veggie patch. Kids can paint them, create mosaics or make collages.

Create your own scarecrow from old clothes, stuffed with pillows/straw on a wooden frame.

Sensory Garden

Kids of all ages can enjoy discovering and playing with their senses in the garden. Incorporating some of these plants will help them explore and a lot of them are edible or great companion plants for the veggie patch.

Touch – soft woolly lamb’s ears, smooth succulents like aloe vera, spiky bottlebrush species

Taste – basil, strawberries, peas, rosemary, carrots, cherry tomatoes

Smell – lemon balm, native mint bush, lavender, jasmine, sweet peas

Bright colours – rainbow chard, sunflowers, marigolds

Sound – sweet corn, bamboo, grasses that rustle in the wind

Top 10 Crops for Kids

Easy & quick to grow, fun to harvest 😊

1. **Sunflower** – brings height and colour to the garden; roast seeds for healthy snacks and keep some to plant next year.
2. **Lettuce/mesculin** – they grow quickly and in a variety of colours and shapes. A great way for kids to connect with salad.
3. **Radishes** – write your child’s name in the soil and sow the radish seeds into the markings, 3-4 days later the name will sprout out of the ground!
4. **Snow peas** – you don’t need a trellis to grow them up and with edible pods they can be enjoyed straight off the plant.
5. **Cherry tomatoes** – colourful, fun and tasty. Can be grown in pots if space is limited.
6. **Nasturtiums** – pest resistant so they are successful to grow and the flowers are edible – pop them in a salad!
7. **Carrots** – can be sown directly into the soil. Small/colourful varieties available and fun to eat.
8. **Potatoes** – a ‘never fail’ crop! Have fun planting them too. Create a game with throwing seed potatoes at targets in the trenches you have dug.
9. **Pumpkin** – like the sunflower, seeds can be dried and eaten or saved for next year’s planting. Flesh is great for pies, roasting, soups and you can also carve the pumpkin into a piece of art or a lantern.
10. **Sprouting seeds** – a mini crop for the glass house or window sill. Bean sprouts, wheatgrass and alfalfa are all quick sprouters. You could grow them in ‘Potato Heads’, or in egg shells, on damp cotton wool so that the ‘hair’ grows up and you can create your own crazy face!



Compost tips

You can create your own soil food by composting your kitchen scraps and garden waste. Compost improves the soil by increasing the organic matter and creates natural, slow-release nutrients. It also helps with soil erosion and moisture retention.

What to put in your compost:

Veg and fruit peelings

Egg shells

Corrugated cardboard

Seaweed

Egg boxes

Torn up newspaper

Dead flowers, fallen leaves and shredded garden prunings

Weeds (not in seed!)

Tea leaves/bags and coffee grounds

Straw

Grass cuttings

Manure: chook poo, mushroom compost, sheep and cow poo and worm castings from worm farms

NOTE: Don't put in cooked food of ANY description or raw meat = attracts rats!

Organic recipes for pest control

Here are some simple home-made recipes for getting on top of any unwanted visitors in your garden:

Grubs and Caterpillars – dust caterpillars and slugs with wood ash, fine sand or flour. Soap spray is also effective.

Scale Insects – Combine a tablespoon of liquid soap with a cup of vegetable oil. Dilute a tablespoon of the mixture with a cup of water. Shake well before spraying on insects.

Aphids, white flies, caterpillars, mealy bugs and scale insects – Dissolve 50 grams of PURE soap in a litre of hot water. Allow to cool. Shake well and spray on plants affected by these. Do not use detergent, only PURE soap.

Safety

Remember to **slip, slop slap** with long sleeved shirts and trousers, sunhat and sunscreen. Gloves aren't necessary – kids love to get their hands dirty – but you can get tough small gardening gloves for kids for those rougher tougher tasks. In summer try and garden in the morning and late afternoon to avoid the heat of the day and stay in the shade where possible – this will also help when you water the plants, allowing them to take up more of the moisture rather than it evaporating. Always supervise children around sharp tools, water and any pesticides you might be using. Ensure that the garden is fenced securely so little feet can't wander off.