



Unique Garden Centre

KIDS IN THE GARDEN

In this frantic day and age, spending quality time together is a constant challenge for any family. Gardening with kids is a great way to spend some of that quality time together and involve the kids in something that you enjoy!

There are many ways to get your kids involved. Start with simple container gardens. Pick out a nice container and bright flowering annuals for each child. Children love having their very own "plot" to take care of and marvel over how fast they grow.

Kids have a strong connection to nature. They are forever collecting rocks, sea shells and even interesting sticks. Let them decorate their pots with some of their collection. Add a whirly bird or wind chimes and they are all set.

Here are some great suggestions for plant combinations for containers.

1. Bunny grass, geranium, Petunia, Alyssum, Diascia (Sunny)
2. Tuberous Begonia, Pansy, Impatience, vinca vine. (shady)
3. Fuchsia, Pansy, Lobelia (Shady)
4. Ornamental grass, Marigold, Gazania, Kenilworth Ivy, (sunny)
5. Annual Aster, Bidens, New Guinea Impatient, lobelia, potato vine (sunny)
6. Ageratum, Dusty Miller, Blue Salvia, Bacopa (sunny)
7. Osteospermum, Ageratum, Coleus, Verbena, Ivy, (sunny)
8. Dwarf Sunflower, Snapdragons, Mini Rose, Diascia (sunny)
9. Dahlia, Brachyscome, Sweet pea (as a trailer) (sunny)

Let them mix some vegetables into the planters, and they will be begging to eat 'their' vegetables. Try these combinations.

1. Tomato, Carrots, Painted Sage. Lettuce (sunny)
2. Sunflower, cucumber, Flowering Kale (sunny)
3. Tuberous begonia, Strawberries, Ivy (morning sun)

If you have room in your yard or garden, let children have their own patch of plants. Here they can have whatever veggies they want. Kids always want pumpkins! They could grow a birdhouse gourd that could then become a winter project. Try fruit: blueberries, raspberries, strawberries.

Don't forget to bring the children with you in the fall to pick out some spring flowering bulbs. Mix them all up and then plant them. The fun is in not knowing what the garden will look like until the bulbs bloom in spring.

If you have older children that want a little challenge, why not try water gardening. A half barrel or preformed pond container are great starter sizes. Water plants are a little more exotic and appeal to the older child and there are lots they can learn about the ecosystems. Of course fish appeal to all ages!

Taking the time to garden with your children teaches them that it's not all weeding and mowing grass. Instead you can instill a sense of responsibility, accomplishment and even pride in the little piece of nature that they have created themselves. Most importantly, they spend time with you and have many happy memories of the taste of that first homegrown strawberry or the fiery glint of a Halloween pumpkin from the back yard.



LOOK FOR OUR 'CHILDREN'S GARDEN' PRE-PLANTED CONTAINERS

What you need to plant a Children's Container

1. A container that is fairly large and deep. Plastic is good and they come in a variety of styles. Make sure it has ample drainage, kids sometimes like to over water.
2. Children sized gloves. They love to have their own gloves that the adults can't borrow.
3. Proper potting soil mix. The soil needs to be an organic type. A good basic mix is equal amounts of peatmoss, potting soil, perlite.
4. Slow release fertilizer. This way the children don't have to remember to fertilize.
5. Inoculants to use at the time of planting to reduce shock and improve vigor and health of plants. (Plants require less fertilizer and are more drought and disease resistant.)
6. A mix of tall, medium and low growing annuals with a trailer. Make sure that you don't mix sun loving plants with shade plants.
7. Water.

Some Basic Tips for Gardeners Working with Kids

- A picture is worth a thousand words. Never tell kids something you could show them.
- Young kids have a very short attention span. Make sure that you have lots of options available so they can get started immediately and stay busy. Digging holes is one thing that seems to hold endless fascination.
- Instant gratification helps a lot. Plant radishes even if you don't like them-they come up in three or four days.
- Growing their own will generally get kids to try eating things they otherwise wouldn't walk into the same room with.
- GETTING DIRTY IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF GROWING UP.
- Your role should be as facilitator, rather than as a leader who imposes direction. Be a good model.
- When giving out supplies to several kids, try to keep seeds, tools, etc. as similar as possible to avoid the inevitable squabbles.
- After an activity, do something to reinforce what everyone has learned. Talk about what went on, who did what, who saw what. If you can, have them write things down or draw pictures. If they're too young, take dictation.
- Many kids who won't talk in a large group will often speak easily in a small group.



- When working with older kids (past about 13), one-to-one works better than groups, since gardening (and anything else that could get you dirty) is a remarkably un-cool and disgusting way to spend time. Try to add responsibility and ownership to projects. ("Quincy is in charge of the wheelbarrow today.") Try pairing up older kids with younger ones. Rest assured that if you give them a healthy respect for gardens and green things when they are young, it will stay with them throughout their lives.

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For those without the obvious pleasures of a pool or a swing set, gardening is becoming the new family playground and for good reason. In the garden, the cares of the world drift away and are replaced by exquisite scents and breathtaking displays of beauty. What a wonderful experience to share with your children.

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Container Gardens are wonderful for younger children. Let them pick out their own flowers at the garden centre to plant in the containers. Add an accessory such as a whirly bird or wind chimes. Children love to plant up a gift for Grandma or Grandpa.

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