

10 tips for gardening with the kids

<http://www.aboutkidshealth.ca/En/News/NewsAndFeatures/Pages/kids-in-garden.aspx>

Dirt, water, and the outdoors: kids and gardens are a great match. But if you're not yet sure about gardening with your kids, here are some tips to help you get started.

1. Let kids use their hands

Kids love manual tasks that adults may find tedious, like shelling peas, poking seeds into the soil, picking currants off the stem, or dead-heading flowers. Explain what to do and put those nimble little fingers to work.

2. Invest in some kid-size tools

Kids will want to use your tools, but an adult-size spade that's longer than your child is tall won't be easy to use. To avoid frustration, get a few lightweight, well-made tools sized for small hands.

3. Don't worry too much about a little dirt..

Young kids in particular may eat dirt when they're in the garden, especially if it's clinging to a freshly-pulled carrot. This is normal and, in general, a few grams of dirt won't harm them. To reduce the risks of parasites and bacteria in garden soil, pick up animal waste promptly and use well-rotted compost, not fresh manure, as fertilizer.

4. ...in fact, embrace kids' love of mud and mess

If you need a hole dug or a bucket of water flung somewhere, you may be in luck. Kids rarely find any job too dirty.

"There's something about dirt," says Steven Biggs, a gardening coach and father of Emma, 6, Quinn, 4, and Keaton, 2. "My two little boys are crazy about anything involving digging. A few times I've been out digging and they'll run over with their diggers and tractors and want to dig beside me."

Just be sure they're wearing old clothes that can be washed, or a bathing suit (or nothing at all). "I think if parents want their kids in the garden, you have to tell yourself beforehand they will get dirty," says Biggs.

5. There can still be rules

Letting the kids into the garden doesn't have to mean anarchy. You can make and enforce rules about where they can go and what they can do, like "don't go past these rocks," or "don't pick these flowers."

Make sure the rules are clear and specific. "If I say 'stay out of the garden,' that doesn't really sink in, but if I say 'stay on the path,' that works beautifully," says Biggs.

6. Give kids a patch of their own

Set up a patch, or a container, that your child can plan and care for herself. Your child will enjoy choosing plants, looking after them, and watching them grow. If it's a larger patch, you can put in stepping stones for ease of movement.

To avoid the “out of sight, out of mind” problem and encourage your child to spend time in “her” garden, put it somewhere easy to see and get to.

7. Don't be deterred by small spaces

Even if you live in an apartment, you can still involve kids in gardening. Set up a window box for them, or get them to help with the house plants. A planter of fresh herbs for cooking can be a great way to introduce kids to new flavours.

8. Stay safe

If you have toxic plants, put them in a part of the garden that's off-limits. Teach older kids to recognize plants that aren't safe to eat.

Like any activity involving sharp edges and power tools, gardening can cause injuries. Teach kids to treat lawnmowers, hedge trimmers, and shears with respect, and supervise their use.

And, of course, slap on the sunscreen.

9. Accept imperfection

Inevitably, some of your plants will be stepped on or eaten. Supervising your kids in the garden will probably slow you down as well.

“It's more to encourage them just being out there, at first,” says Biggs. Set realistic expectations for yourself and your kids, and don't worry too much if a task isn't done exactly to your standards.

10. Have fun

Don't just dig for potatoes; dig for pirate treasure. Use garden paths as roads for cars and trucks. Take wheelbarrow rides. Look for rainbows in the sprinkler. Enjoy the sights, smells, and textures of the garden. Above all, don't try to turn gardening into a chore; enjoy the time together. You might find yourself surprised by what your kids can teach you about the garden.

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