

# Gardening's great for kids

Childhood development specialists have long understood the value of gardening. Gardening provides children with invaluable early life creative experiences. It also teaches a number of important life lessons, including a strong commitment to responsibility, and emphasizes the rewards one gains from care giving and nurturing.

Many experts believe that one of the most rewarding experiences a child can have is to reap the rewards of fresh flowers, fruits and vegetables grown in one's own garden.

Children as young as two years old can be successful gardeners. The trick, however, is to start on a scale to match the youngsters' physical capabilities and attention span.

To get started, choose an area where you know things will grow or are currently growing. Vegetables and annual flowers need a full day of sun and plenty of water. The area you choose for your beginning gardener should be level, to avoid having seeds or unestablished plants run off after a heavy rain or watering.

The time to get started is after what gardeners call the "last fear of frost." You want the soil warm and dry enough to work easily with your hands.

Next, clear the designed garden area of all vegetation. Many children seem to like having their garden staked and tied off with cord, making this their own special territory. Next, spread compost or peat moss or shredded leaves on the ground at the rate of two to three inches. Add a good general garden fertilizer,

about one pound per 10 square feet. Work this into the soil.

The remaining preparation is to divide the garden into rows with stakes and string. Consult the seed packet information to determine how far apart rows should be and how deep to plant the seed.

After the work of planting is done, the real lessons of gardening begin, because it is time for "tending" before any results are seen. The child learns that this responsibility is necessary if future results are to be realized.

When the young plants reach two to three inches in height, "thin" out the garden by pulling out extra seedlings. Too many plants in one bed will rob all the plants of needed growing space and nutrients.

When plants reach three to four inches high, it's time to sprinkle small amounts of fertilizer along the side of each row, then water lightly. An alternative is to use a water soluble fertilizer, which will allow you to feed and water at the same time.

A weekly or twice-weekly weeding and watering is about the only care the new plants will need, until it's time to pick the flowers for an indoor bouquet or to harvest the fresh vegetables for the dinner table.

To teach a child gardening is to provide that child with a skill that will last a lifetime. Among some of their happiest memories, senior citizens often describe their early gardening experiences under the watchful eye of a caring adult. Begin now to build a joy of gardening that your children will always cherish.



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#### Gardener's Tip

Prepare the beds for your shrubs and perennials thoroughly and deeply with peat moss and manure. Remember, your plants will be coming back year after year and may not appreciate later digging and disruption to their environment.

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