



Anderson's Seed and Garden, Inc.

"Our Seeds Succeed"

# Gardening With Children

Gardening with children is not only fun, it gives them a skill they can use for a life-time. Children are more apt to develop a fondness for plants if they associate gardening with fun rather than work. Insisting that your kids weed the vegetable patch each Saturday without sharing the joy of picking a bouquet of lilacs or planting a few seeds is likely to put them off to horticulture for life. It is all in the way you approach gardening with them. The following is a short checklist of things that can help gardening chores to be more kid friendly:

- Keep projects and instructions simple.
- Acquire kid-size gardening tools so they will be able to work comfortably.
- Let children make some of their own decisions about what to plant and where; let them make a few mistakes too, it's how they learn.
- Take children on trips to the Anderson's to pick out seeds and see them weighed out. Have them help you pick out flowers.
- If you have the space, give a child a small patch of his own to design with whatever they want.
- Garden for short periods of time; changing activities frequently keeps kids interested.
- Plant vegetables your kids will eat. Concentrate on varieties that are unique and different, such as 'lemon' cucumbers, or 'yellow pear' tomatoes, try a yellow watermelon called 'yellow doll', or a round 'eight ball' zucchini.
- Garden with them, quietly reasoning and teaching as you go. Children who like gardening will bring practical first-hand knowledge to biology class when they are older. Teach them a botany or entomology lesson. A lot of science happens in a garden: the miracle of germination, soil chemistry, and the bug-eat-bug world of beneficial insects destroying their prey.

## **Here are some time tested gardening activities and projects that all children seem to love:**

- Plant a 'salad' or 'pizza' garden in a giant pot; include a bush tomato, oregano, basil, leaf lettuce, and a cucumber vine with a trellis.
- Make your own salsa from homegrown tomatoes.
- Grow flowers like violets, pansies, coreopsis, daisies, and ornamental grasses; press the blooms to preserve them and save them for craft projects in the winter.
- Build a tepee out of long, stout bamboo stakes lashed together at the top. Plant a pole bean at the base of each stake. Children will love harvesting beans from inside the tepee.
- Grow anything "giant": pumpkins, dahlias, sunflowers, and squash. Bigger is better!

## Gardening With Children

- Plant "baby" anything; carrots, potatoes, beets, miniature dahlias, and mini pumpkins. Vegetables always taste better when you have harvested and prepared them yourselves.
- Start an oak tree from an acorn. Or plant a "signature" tree with your child; let him or her help choose the variety.
- Plant a little cactus garden in an old worn out sneaker. Use succulents without thorns such as hen-n-chicks and trailing sedums.
- Fill a small plot with plants that are interesting to touch: lamb's ear, strawflower and sensitive plant. A fragrance garden can include scented geraniums, stocks, rosemary, lavender, and other herbs.
- Gather rose petals for drying into potpourri. Fill a small muslin bag or decorate a bowl to hold the dried petals.
- Grow a variety of gourds. After harvesting, have the kids paint them. Paint them up for Halloween and set them out with your pumpkins.

With the arrival of fall, cold weather puts a stop to outdoor gardening. This does not mean that we have to wait until the next spring to enjoy our plants again. Indoor gardening is an activity you can enjoy year round. Not only will it keep your children interested in gardening it is good for your families health. Here are some indoor gardening ideas.

- Force a hyacinth bulb into bloom in a small vase of water or measure how fast a giant amaryllis stalk grows. Grow some paperwhites in rocks and watch them bloom in just a few weeks. There are many fall bulbs that can be "forced" to bloom indoors. We have many to choose from in October.
- Cut a paper towel into two or three long strips. Place seeds on one strip, cover with the other and place on a sheet of plastic wrap. This keeps the seeds nice and moist and creates a greenhouse effect. Take the wrapped seeds and place in a zippered plastic bag. After a couple days the seeds will start to germinate. Once they do, take them out of the plastic bag along with the paper-towel wrapping and plant them in the garden. This is a good project to start in the early spring so you will have plants, just in time for spring.
- Germinate grapefruit seeds indoors; or start an avocado pit. Try a sweet potato top or pineapple top in a pot of soil-less mix such as Ferti-lome's Ultimate Potting Mix, or Vermiculite.
- Start tomato and pepper seeds on the windowsill for transplanting 6-8 weeks before the last frost.
- A really easy indoor houseplant to grow from seed in a sensitive plant. Plant 5-6 seeds in a 6" pot and watch them grow. When you touch them, the leaves curl up! Kids love it!