

Children in the Garden

by Diana Pieti

We have already written about what gardening does for adults and scientists have proven that there is a direct correlation between our brains and the soil we love to dig in. And of course, there is the possibility of burning some calories, and lowering your blood pressure too.

But what about kids? What do they get from gardening? We think it might be far more than adults. They come by gardening naturally because they have had some beginnings by playing in the dirt. They have made tunnels, built roads for their little cars, and made mud pies to feed their fuzzy friends. Gardening can be just plain fun, will encourage their creativity even more and they will love the outdoors. What steps can we take to ensure that they will love gardening so much that it will become a lifetime passion?

Give them their own space. Perhaps their old sandbox that they have outgrown will be just perfect if located where it will get plenty of sun. Maybe a small corner of your garden or even some pots or old pails for their first garden. They can help paint those pails to make them festive. Let's find them some tools that fit their hands so that it helps them become successful.

Choose some of their plants that grow quickly to keep their interest and include some with fragrance. Teach them about seeds, from how tiny some are to how big too, and that some look like the food they produce, like peas. Get the paints out and send the kids rock hunting and help them paint the names of things on those rocks so they can use them as markers. As you plan be sure to include all the instructions from the back of the seed packet and as the kids grow, they can do their own reading to get the best results. There is so much information there. It has been proven that if kids grow plants, they will be more interested in tasting them, so gardening teaches them to increase their interest in healthy food.

Do some fun stuff like creating a tipi using some tall bamboo and have the kids plant sunflowers and something vining like beans to grow on it. What a secret spot to play in as it grows. How about a pizza garden, that includes tomatoes, basil, and onions, or a salsa garden that needs tomatoes, onions, cilantro, etc. Both can be the start of kids preparing some of their own food and would be fun to eat it in the tipi.

Fairy gardens are popular and can be a very small space with tiny plants and their favorite miniatures to place in it. There are so many examples online to get some ideas.

Take some photos of them with their flowers or those carrots they have grown. This can be the start of a journal. Let it be theirs with supplies such as markers and old gardening catalogs they can cut up. And be sure to save these journals as they grow so they can see this documentation of their growth in the garden.

Our Master Gardener program has a Youth Team and their leadership guiding kids is wonderful. They have taught kids about worms such as red wigglers, how to help us have more bees and

other pollinators, how to press flowers and other crafts. This group of good volunteers can be found the last Sunday of every month at the downtown Farmer's Market doing projects with kids. Mark this on your calendars.

The Youth team engages youth of any age and background, and gardening experience isn't required. The team gears information and activities to participants' age and gardening experience; the team can start with basics and create fun and educational activities for all.

One of the most rewarding activities is to help youth grow things they can eat straight out of the garden. They are also able to take vegetables home to share with their families and that's very exciting!

The Yakima Master Gardener Youth Team is happy to partner with groups of any size. You may reach them by emailing or calling our clinic.

For any gardening questions - you are always welcome to contact our Master Gardener Clinic at 509-574-1604 or email gardener@co.yakima.wa.us.