



Horticultural Therapy Association of Victoria

Gardening for children

Children can learn new skills, have fun, play and develop self-confidence by spending time in the garden, tending plants and growing their own food. Most children enjoy being outdoors and love digging in the soil, getting dirty, creating things and watching plants grow.

Children learn from growing things

People of all ages can enjoy gardening but children, in particular, will have lots of fun and gain special benefits. Gardening is educational and develops skills including:

- **Responsibility** - from caring for and tending plants.
- **Understanding** - as they learn about cause and effect (for example, plants die without water, weeds compete with plants for nutrients, etc).
- **Self confidence** - from achieving their goals and enjoying the food they have grown.
- **Love of nature** - a chance to learn about the outdoor environment in a safe and pleasant place.
- **Reasoning and discovery** - as they learn about science, botany, nutrition and simple construction.
- **Physical activity** - that is fun, productive and healthy.
- **Cooperation** - including shared play activity and teamwork.
- **Creativity** – designing and planting out a garden.
- **Nutrition** - learning about sources of fresh food and their health benefits.

How to get children interested

Try these suggestions to get children involved and interested in creating a garden.

- Keep it simple.
- Give children their own garden space; it can even be a large container or a few pots.
- Involve children in the planning and design of the garden.
- Use lightweight, easy to handle and correct size tools and garden equipment.
- Encourage children to dig in the dirt. Younger children love making mud pies.
- Grow interesting plants like sunflowers, corn, pumpkins or tomatoes.
- Use a trellis or tepee to grow beans.
- Plant flowers that attract butterflies, ladybirds and other interesting insects or birds.
- Make a scarecrow.
- Install a water feature, birdbath or sundial.
- Set up a worm farm.
- Visit community gardens, children's farms or the botanic gardens for ideas.

Safety in the garden

Here are a few safety tips that will help make the garden safe for children:

- Select the correct size tool.
- Keep sprays and fertilisers out of reach; garden organically whenever possible.
- Do not use chemicals.
- Provide safe equipment and tool storage.
- Secure fences and gates.
- Provide shade in summer with umbrellas or shade cloth.

- Encourage children to wear a hat, sunscreen, suitable clothing and gumboots.
- Be careful with buckets of water around very young children and toddlers.
- Avoid poisonous plants or may cause allergic reactions.

Plant selection

A sensory garden has elements that stimulate all of our senses. This includes plants that have special smell, taste, touch and sight qualities. Also include plants with textural qualities such as lamb's ears, fennel, and peppermint geranium.

An edible garden is a garden that contains flowers, herbs, seeds, berries and plants that you can eat.

Children like large, brightly coloured flowers and vegetables that grow quickly. Plants such as sunflowers, corn and pumpkins are suitable.

Different ages in the garden

Toddlers, preschool, primary school aged and older children will all have different expectations and learning experiences from exposure to an edible garden. Younger children will require careful supervision during activities. Older children are physically capable of handling a variety of activities including lifting, carrying, mulching and pruning.

Activities in the garden

Choose activities that suit the child's age. Suggestions include:

- Preparing the soil
- Planting vegetables, fruits and flowers in the correct season
- Watering the garden
- Weeding
- Gathering seeds and dried flowers
- Deadheading flowers
- Replanting and re-potting
- Composting, recycling and mulching
- Having a worm farm
- Craft activities from harvested seeds, plants and flowers
- Picking vegetables and fruits when they are ready to eat
- Preparing food
- Discussing the nutritional benefits of fruit and vegetables grown.
- Healthy cooking, making salads and preparing school lunches.

Where to get help

- Community or local garden groups
- Local council
- Cultivating Community Email: info@cultivatingcommunity.org.au
- Horticultural Therapy Association of Victoria Tel:(03) 9836 1128

For further information contact –

Horticultural Therapy Association of Victoria

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