

Fun with Gardening



Here are some fun gardening ideas using everyday, accessible materials!

- ✓ **Explore nature.**
- ✓ **Get a break from technology.**
- ✓ **Engage the whole family (including siblings).**
- ✓ **Have some good ol' fashioned FUN together!**

Think Outside the “Pot”!

Anything can become a garden!

Use whatever you have around the house to grow things in (e.g., large flowerpots, an empty coffee can or jar, Dad’s old boot, a big plastic tub or trash can).

Gardens can be hanging from above or they can grow from the ground. Think about making your garden accessible to your child’s height or the height of their wheelchair.



Create Themed Gardens

- **Pizza Garden** – Grow basil, oregano, tomatoes and cheese (will cheese grow?).
- **Salsa Garden** – Plant tomatoes, cilantro and jalapeño peppers.
- **Scent Garden** – In addition to the scents in your garden, think about and describe to your child other smells when you're outside – cut grass, flowers, rain.
- **Sound Garden** – Make your own wind chimes. Listen to the birds chirping, a shovel clanging, a pinwheel blowing in the wind, a sprinkler watering the grass, the faucet filling up a watering can.
- **Touch and Feel Garden** – Some plants and herbs are very soft, some are prickly. Don't forget to touch the underside of the leaves, point out different shapes of the flowers and leaves, eat edible flowers. Use descriptive words when telling your child about your garden.
- **Color Garden** – Just because your child is blind doesn't mean you shouldn't talk about colors. Gardens can be planted in one color or many colors. Red flowers might feel warm to the touch; purple flowers may feel cooler.

What other gardens can you think of?



Make Your Own Watering Can

- Turn a gallon of milk into a watering can by poking holes in the lid of a clean plastic milk jug.
- Clean out an empty soy sauce, vinegar or spice jar. Save the lid. Fill it with water, replace and close the lid. Turn the bottle upside down to "season" your plant.
- Recycle a plastic water bottle with a couple of holes poked in the top to water your plant.
- Sippy cups make for kid-friendly watering cans, too!



Growing Tips

- Very young children like quick results. Remember to plant things that grow quickly – carrots, spinach, lettuce, grass seed, herbs.
- Crunched for time? Seedlings from the garden center are also easy to plant.
- Checking on your plant every day can become part of your routine with your child. Talk about what the plant looks like, how it feels to the touch, if it has a smell. Whose turn is it to water the plant? What happens to the plant if you forget to water it or it doesn't get enough sun?

Fun Activities

- **Take Nature Walks Together:** Describe what you smell, hear, and feel. Stomp in puddles, smell the bark of a tree.
- **Celebrate International Mud Day-June 29:** Play in mud, put handprints or footprints in mud, make mud handprints on paper.
- **Make a Gardening Tactile Book:** Make a book with things you touched during your gardening project. A seed packet, potting soil, flower petals or leaves, a bandana. When you read it out loud, you can revisit the experience with your child.
- **Read a Gardening-Themed Book with Your Child.** Some books are available on YouTube. They're read by a lot of different people so just find one that your child likes to listen to.



Our Favorite Gardening Books

- Mud Pies by Marjorie Winslow
- Stuck in the Mud by Shana Corey
- The Carrot Seed by Ruth Kraus
- Plant the Tiny Seed by Christie Matherson
- Growing Vegetable Soup by Lois Ehlert

It's the Idea That Counts

Don't worry if your child isn't into the gardening activity. Some children with blindness or visual impairments are easily overwhelmed by new textures or smells; others have limited mobility that makes getting outside more challenging. You can always make a sensory bin filled with garden-themed materials: tiny flowerpots, rocks, leaves, grass, soil, shovel, rake, glove, real vegetables and fruits.

Think about how much learning naturally goes into gardening!

Concepts Your Child Will Learn

- ✓ Wet/dry
- ✓ Squishy/solid
- ✓ Smell
- ✓ Math/quantity
- ✓ Light/dark
- ✓ Warm/cool
- ✓ Big/little
- ✓ Under/in/next to/on top of
- ✓ Growth and change
- ✓ Engage all senses

What Gardening Can Teach Your Child

- ✓ Responsibility
- ✓ Self-confidence
- ✓ Cause and effect
- ✓ Curiosity
- ✓ Physical activity
- ✓ A love of nature
- ✓ Teamwork
- ✓ Math skills
- ✓ Creativity

Reference:

<https://www.montessorinature.com/importance-benefits-gardening-children-toddlers-preschoolers/>
<https://www.thespruce.com/container-garden-projects-kids-will-love-847955>

Five Container Garden Projects

Celery sprouts – Buy a bunch of celery. Organic is best because there’s no pesticide residue. Look for a bunch that’s firm with tightly packed stalks and green, fresh-looking leaves. Cut off the stalks and save them for another use. Place the celery bottom in a small dish with about a half inch of water. In a day or two, you’ll see celery leaves sprouting. Once it forms roots, you can plant the celery bottom in a larger container or in your garden.



Sweet potato vines – Historically, people grew sweet potatoes as decorative houseplants. To sprout a sweet potato, submerge half of a washed, unpeeled sweet potato in a jar of water, with toothpicks propping up the dry half. Young leaves and stems will grow from the top of the potato; they’re also edible!

Toy garden – A plastic kiddie pool makes a great, raised garden bed, and trucks, wagons and anything else that can hold enough potting soil and a plant works, too. The more soil your toy holds, the more options you’ll have regarding what to plant. Succulents are great for small toys. Don’t grow anything edible in a plastic toy, though. The material is not food-grade.



Silly stocking caterpillar – Fill a nylon knee-hi stocking with potting soil. Make sure it is packed tightly. Tie the end of the stocking so the dirt doesn’t fall out. With a knife, cut slits in the top of the stocking and sprinkle grass seed mix on top of the dirt, working it in gently with your fingers. Keep the stocking indoors by a sunny window on a tray so it’s easy to water and to prevent birds from eating the grass seed. Water the stocking regularly. In about a week, you’ll have grass. Add some legs and antennae to your caterpillar with pipe cleaners and glue on some pom pom eyeballs.

Grass people – Fill a Styrofoam cup with potting soil. Sprinkle one tablespoon of grass seed mix on top of the dirt. Cover the seeds with another thin layer of potting soil, and water the soil until it feels barely moist. A spray bottle will prevent overwatering. Decorate the outside of the cup with facial features using googly eyes, pom poms, shapes cut out of construction paper or just colored markers. When the grass grows, you can give your person a “haircut” and the grass will grow back! If you use a clear plastic cup instead of a Styrofoam cup, you can watch the roots of the grass grow, too.

