

The Benefits of Gardening with Children

Gardening is a good way to get outdoors while developing coordination and general gross motor skills.

Gardening is a wonderful activity for building a child holistically. How do you approach holistic education through gardening?

Spending time in the garden offers opportunities to develop all kinds of skills. Physical, emotional, spatial, mathematical, sensory awareness, character development, creative ideas, and just a love and appreciation of nature.

The garden is nature's schoolyard. Here are some ideas of how you can use this environment to derive these benefits:

Physical Development

Digging, raking, pushing the wheelbarrow, and planting new plants. All of these actions, and many more, are the physical advantages of working in the garden.

Find a set of gardening tools that are the right size for your child and start off with the mini wheelbarrow and some seedlings to plant. Give your toddler their own portion of the garden to work in so your prize pansies are not dug up in a hurry.

Make a sign that labels your child's portion of the garden and see how proud they will become of their little spot.

Emotional Growth

Fostering a sense of joy as plants flower and grow is certainly a great emotional by-product of gardening. Exploring nature through gardening brings the delightful experience of watching butterflies and ladybirds share the garden too.

Mixed emotions are felt when plants do not grow so well. Then there is the satisfaction of reaping a crop of baby carrots. Washing them and eating them right there in the garden where they grew.

Spatial Skills

These come naturally in a garden as seedlings are planted with space to grow. Seeds are planted in a row and thinned out to allow them to grow fully and fill their space. Seeds are planted in pots and arranged in the garden.

The garden is a great space to appreciate how things grow and the space they need, from big trees to tiny flowers.

Mathematical Skills

There are so many opportunities in the garden to develop practical early maths skills. Counting, measuring, comparing, and position in space are just a few.

There is no end to the opportunities for practising these skills, counting and appreciating the plants, flowers and seeds as they grow.

Let young children handle big seeds initially or put tiny seeds into a salt shaker with some sand to sprinkle in the garden.

Sensory Awareness

Gardening, and exploring nature, awakens so many sensory elements of the growing child. The texture of the soil to touch, the scent of the flowers, the sound of the insects and birds, the taste of the vegetables and fruit and the amazing colours nature inspires us with.

Take your child on a nature walk and talk about what they see, smell, touch, taste and hear in the garden. It is one of the places where all five senses can be experienced.

Character Development

Little characters will just bloom and grow through the life lessons gardening can teach your child. Patience is a big characteristic that young children struggle to develop. Daily visits to the garden to watch and water seeds as they grow requires patience.

Then the rewards of that patience come to fruition as the seeds grow. Patience is rewarded when the harvest of a vegetable or flowers arrive to be enjoyed and shared with the family.

Responsibility is another character trait that gardening encourages. Your child is responsible for their patch of the garden. Watering and weeding are two tasks encouraging responsibility.

Gardening develops children's self-confidence as they see they can plant the seeds and watch them grow and harvest a crop at the end.

1. Garden Fantasy Creation

Set aside a part of your garden for your child to create a garden theme. It could be a fairy garden or a dinosaur garden.

Any theme will do with figurines and plants to match the theme. Flowers for fairies and cacti and succulents for the dino-world. Or you could use shapes to create a garden. Use stones for the outline and sow seeds to grow in the shapes.

Theme gardens encourage fantasy play and a personal interest in part of the garden.

2. Make a Scarecrow

This is a fun-filled activity. Creating a scarecrow to sit in the vegetable garden can be a team effort and a chance to repurpose some old clothes and a garden hat.

Read some stories about scarecrows. There's Scarecrow's Hat by Tim Preston, or The Shy Scarecrow by Mary Packard, and The Scarecrow's Dance by Jane Yolen. These and many other lovely stories are written about scarecrows.

3. Make Growing Greeting Cards

This is a lovely way to send a garden message or spring greeting.

Use soft pastel paper that will eventually be absorbed into the soil. Create your message or symbol with fine seeds like petunia or alyssum. Glue the seeds on in the shape and plant the card. Then watch the message grow.

4. Make a Bird Feeder

This simple bird feeder just needs a toilet roll and some birdseed as well as some twine or string. The toilet roll can be rolled in peanut butter and then rolled in birdseed. The string or twine loops through the toilet roll and then the bird feeder is ready to hang in a tree for the lucky birds.

An alternative sticky agent would be water based glue to make the seeds adhere to the cardboard toilet roll.

5. Egg Box Caterpillars

Here is a garden type craft that does not require a garden, just some light and water and an old egg box.

Use the bottom part with little portions that hold the eggs.

Cut off the top of the box and save some of the cardboard for your caterpillar head.

Put some soil into each egg portion.

Cut out and draw a goofy caterpillar face.

You can add pipe cleaners for feelers and google eyes if you have them available.

Sprinkle some grass seed or mustard seed or any seed of a small plant into each section of the egg box.

Water gently and watch the caterpillar grow some hairy tufts.