



Take Your Kids into the **Garden**

Your Experiences Will Grow Memories to Last a Lifetime



Back in 1962, during the summer I turned six, I vividly remember collecting sweet purple mulberries that fell from an enormous tree that canopied our suburban front yard.

My best friend, Susie, and I made our own version of mulberry “wine” by mashing the delicate berries in a tin coffee can, supplied by my mother. We were a sight, purple tongues and all! Mom was perfectly happy to have us within her line of vision but otherwise entertained while she tended her garden—a solo pursuit.

Because she considered gardening an adult activity, none of her wisdom was passed down to me—what a lost opportunity! Decades passed before I learned to plant, weed, and fertilize a beautiful plot of my own.

But today, things have changed. Creative elementary school teachers use gardening projects to illustrate a science, botany, or physics lesson, and wise parents have figured out that rather than sneak out into the garden during naptime, it’s much more fun to garden with their children.

If given an opportunity, kids can play a rewarding role in the creation and tending of a family garden. The resulting horticultural lessons will form the basis for a lifelong hobby and wonderful shared memories between parent and child.

There are other benefits, such as getting your kids more interested in food they eat because they’ve helped grow it. And what mom doesn’t want to drag her children away from computer, video games, and television and push them out the door for some good old-fashioned fresh air?

If you’re ready to pull on your Wellies and jump into the idea of gardening with your kids, here are some excellent books to get you started.

In *I Love Dirt!: 52 Activities to Help You and Your Kids Discover the Wonders of Nature*, Jennifer Ward poses garden-related questions, like: Why are there so many colors in nature? What makes new plants sprout in the spring? Why are so many plants green? She builds fifty-two entertaining projects and activities to illustrate the answers.

For more than a decade, Cindy Krezel coordinated children’s programs at Martin Viette Nurseries on Long Island, New York. Her experiences gave her material for two lively books on the subject. *Kids’ Container Gardening: Year-Round Projects for Inside and Out* gives young gardeners a chance to develop their green thumbs with projects like starting an early-spring

greenhouse in takeout-food containers, building a garden bowl for Mother’s Day, making veggie baskets with basil, hanging cherry tomatoes and marigolds, and creating a “Pot Person” of clay pots and beads with peat moss for hair.

Krezel’s other title, *101 Kid-Friendly Plants: Fun Plants and Family Garden Projects*, gives parents an extensive list of flowers, vegetables, trees, and shrubs that are safe for children and fun to incorporate into residential gardens. All the plants Krezel recommends have been approved by the National Capital Poison Center. The book also offers a section on a few plants never to use with kids, among them lantana, oleander, and wisteria.

“I learned so much about how kids’ minds work when I was at the garden center,” says Krezel. “It’s the most gratifying thing to hear a child say, ‘We made salad last night, and we used my tomatoes!’ Gardening is a very cool lesson and a great sensory experience, and when everything else in the world may be out of control, life suddenly makes sense in a bigger way when a child is responsible for a plant. Gardening offers some amazing opportunities for bonding with your child. There’s the shared sense of wonder and the kind of sensory, visceral experiences that only gardening can bring us.”

Krezel then recounts a few more stories worth repeating.

“One of my favorite phone messages I ever received was from a little girl who had participated in one of my workshops,” says Krezel. “In her very quiet, tiny voice, it went like this: ‘Hi...this is Melissa. I called to tell you that my plant is growing...right now!’ Click.”

“Once, when I was explaining annuals to a group of kindergarteners,” Krezel remembers, “I told them that annuals are plants that die in the fall. And a little girl looked up at me and said with the wisest eyes, ‘My grandfather was an annual.’ And I said to her, ‘Yes. He lived many years and now he’s gone.’”

“In the garden, you get a sense of the cycles of life and what’s important,” says Krezel. “It opens up the opportunity to have conversations with your kids on subjects that are not always easy to broach. Yes, it’s fun, but it can also be so profound.” *Written by Robyn Roehm Cannon. YHL*



Cindy Krezel's two books, filled with ideas and projects for gardening with children, are a great resource for parents who are trying to cultivate green thumbs in their children.

Better Safe Than Sorry

Gardening with young children is a joyful experience, but always be aware of potentially hazardous plant life that can cause serious health issues, and keep these plants out of your garden and kids’ reach.

Keep this number for the National Capital Poison Center by the phone: 1-800-222-1222. It’s manned 24/7 by a live expert who’s waiting to help in case of an emergency.