

Basic Steps

1. Create a plan (develop a three year plan that adds components each year. Be realistic & start small. Your three year vision will guide you in what to do first. Also, think who will tend the garden if you go on vacation (friend, neighbor, etc.). If during the planting months, then you may need someone to water if there isn't rain for 3 days or install a timer. If during harvest time, you may be able to pick things green and store them until you get home and then have someone water. There are a dozen possibilities so don't think you'll be trapped for the summer at home if you have a garden. You only need to plan ahead.
2. Create a budget. Garden equipment and seeds add up quickly. You may need to make strategic choices.
3. Select a site— in the ground, window boxes, buckets, windowsill, etc. For specifics [click here](#).
4. Create a design and map the garden. There are plenty of on-line programs for this. You may realize that you need to scale back. Include a space for compost. You may not think you need it now, but you will by year two. Also, some plants do better near other plants and other plants demand distance from some plants. There are plenty of books and on-line resources to help you with this. Finally, you won't want to grow some plants in the same place each year. If you have a plan, then the next year, you will know what was where and to move it to a new location. [Click here for more specific suggestions on design and companion planting](#).
5. Create a timeline for starting and completing (if you are a procrastinator). Seasons don't wait just because you haven't finished building a raised bed. There are hundreds or more gardening calendars on-line, including those from the Extension Office in every state. Plus the Farmer's Almanac is at every grocery store checkout so grab one and figure out what planting zone you live in and when you need to plant what. [Click here for plant hardiness zone map](#).
6. Solicit help from others. There can never be enough hands.



7. Make sure you have all the tools you need. Don't skimp on quality. These tools are going to get a lot of work and it truly pays off in time, money, and frustration to have quality tools. Click here for a specific list.



8. Build a toolshed or make room in your garage for a storage area, including a way to keep tools organized and easily accessible (peg boards, hangars, shelves, buckets).

9. Create signage. This isn't necessary, but kids love it. It also helps with identify seeds before they come up and flowers or herbs with which you may not be that familiar.

10. Build a fence if necessary to keep out dogs, cats, and wildlife. Dogs dig, cats make an awful mess, and wildlife will eat and/or trample things.

11. Get your soil tested and determine what kind of soil you have. The extension office in your state has test boxes that you can send off to have your soil tested. The cost is minimal, and then you'll know what, if anything, you need to add and your pH level, which determines how well plants can take up nutrients. Click here for Virginia Extension Soil Testing Lab.

12. Stake out the garden. Where are plants going to go and where are paths going to go?

13. Tools: 18-inch wooden stakes, twine or string, hammers or mallets, measuring tapes, garden site plan). This doesn't need to be linear and in fact, will be more aesthetically pleasing to your child if it isn't. It absolutely does NOT need to be perfect. This is a general working plan not something set in stone (unless you're building beds and then they're pretty permanent for a few years anyway).

14. Prepare your soil. This is the most important step. Healthy soil = success. You want to be successful.

15. You don't need a tiller disturb the precious important microbes the surface that plants well.



and in fact, tilling will topsoil, including and critters that live near need in order to grow

16. Double digging is a loosen the soil to a improve aeration and water drainage, add organic matter to improve the method in which you depth of 24 inches to

soil's structure and fertility. This allows roots to grow down rather than out and gives plants access to water and nutrients deeper in the soil. It reduces the amount of space needed between plants. Sandy soil probably doesn't require double-digging. Double-digging is a lot of work initially, but over time the soil's structure will improve, get looser and easier to dig. Raised bed preparation may not be anything more than loosening the dirt with a spading fork. Weeding, watering, harvesting and pest management are also easier in double dug, raised beds.

17. Plant: Once your beds are dug, then you can start planting based on your design. [Click here for list of plants.](#)
18. Enjoy: enjoy the time you spend with your child in the garden. Have fun.