

Tips



- Leave behind adult ideas about gardening. Start small— salad bowl garden or a couple of containers.
 - Let your child lead you in what he/she wants to do. It's all learning and it should be fun.
 - Let the child make the decisions as much as possible.
 - Include child when deciding where to put the garden.
 - Be prepared for less than perfect planting and be willing to put up with crooked rows and mixed up plants.
 - Give children their own space and let them tend it in their own way.
 - Plan a play area, especially for younger children. Pre-schoolers want to plant and re-plant, dig and explore. Give him/her a space to do this, full of containers with pebbles, bark, seeds, small tools, and other garden-related items to explore.
 - Be a positive role model: show enthusiasm, excitement. Watch your tone of voice. Pay attention to what the child is saying and doing, especially if he/she shows you something.
 - Keep the emphasis on fun and creativity.
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- Garden frequently but for short time periods.
 - Plan your daily activities— what are you trying to accomplish that day? Observation, questioning, independent work, projects, relaxation?
 - Prepare child before going outside by explaining what you will be doing; however, let the child lead when outside.
 - Keep it simple. Don't try to do everything you have planned.
 - Keep chore sessions short and make a game of weeding or limit it to 5 minutes unless your child likes weeding. Some children absolutely love it.
 - Vary activities often and allow for frequent breaks. Let the child choose chores they enjoy. Try to provide more encouragement than direction.
 - Look at what happens as an interesting opportunity to learn, rather than as a failure. Focus on ability, not disability.
 - Have a garden calendar for weeding, watering, planning and planting tasks that you can cross off as they're completed; then celebrate achievements.
 - Look for teachable moments rather than come with prepared action/learning plan.
 - Transition into and out of the garden with little rituals/habits: let the child always open the gate, put your gloves on before you go into the garden, grab your tools and put them in a special place before you need them, etc. Decide what you want to do when you are first going into the garden. Then before you leave, gather your tools, scrape your shoes, double check the gate lock, etc. Transition rituals help kids get in that space to focus on being in the garden with you then leave the garden.
 - Provide a loose framework/routine for your time in the garden: maybe a short tour, then do necessary things, free-time/exploration, then go back over the garden and celebrate what you've done, and clean up. Children like consistency/

- structure within which they can show their independence. Chaos is frightening so provide a framework/routine and allow for things to just happen within it.
- Be a guide, explorer, and learner with your child. If you don't know, say it and then look it up together.
 - Ask guiding questions: how large, where does it live, how do you think it...
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- Talk about what is required for a successful garden.
 - Help your child succeed by sharing your garden know-how.
 - Be familiar with what's going on in your garden space by reading, walking around before or doing a little research.
 - Create a budget— soil, seeds, plants, landscaping elements add up quickly.
 - Test the soil, choose a well-drained, sunny site, add lots of soil amendments and mulch.
 - Teach that growing a healthy garden begins with good soil.
 - Explain what plants need to eat and drink.
 - Allow your child to select planters/containers if doing container gardening— use imagination, almost anything that holds soil and has good drainage can be used.
 - Be prepared for children to get attached to weeds and not want to get rid of them.
 - Be prepared for your child to prefer digging in the dirt so set aside as small area for digging.
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- Keep drinks and snacks available.
 - Use small hand tools, old spoons, and plastic tool sets, rakes, hoes, spades, and gloves or spoons, measuring cups, spatulas.
 - Buy tools at yard sales to off-set costs.
 - Bigger seeds are easier to manage for smaller or less coordinated hands.
 - Mix small seeds with sand or peat moss and sprinkle from a spice jar for better distribution.
 - Plant things that are quick and easy to grow that the child likes (snap peas instead of beets)
 - Encourage enthusiasm by planting seeds that mature quickly and are large enough for a child to easily handle.
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- Take pictures of the child's gardening activities and display the pictures.
 - Invite others to visit the garden or view your projects.
 - Get others to help— parents, grandparents, siblings, sitters, extended family.
 - Document building your site: video, photos, journaling, artwork, etc.
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- Add a water element.
 - Add journaling.
 - Add cooking.
 - Add crafts.



- Add art, music, reading.
- Add a sign for your garden.

- Be creative in recycling— don't use tires or anything petroleum based, but do use pots, pans, plastic ware, fencing, etc. Check donation centers, recycling centers, neighbors castoffs, etc.
- Teach about food chains and food webs, predator and prey, life cycles and habitat, generalists and specialists (raccoons and monarch caterpillars)
- Draw attention to habitat loss, biodiversity and endangered species, human and natural impacts on habitats, native and exotic plants.
- Provide cover for wildlife: nest boxes, densely branched shrubs, evergreens, grasses, hollow trees, rock piles, brush piles, stone walls, etc., places to raise young.
- Practice sustainable gardening.
- Mulch.
- Xeriscape.
- Compost: leaves, grass clippings and trimmings, etc. Cheap alternative to buying soil, adds organic matter to your soil, manages landscape refuse. Partially decomposed plant remains that is called humus. Successful composting requires a certain mix of green and brown materials so read a brochure on easy composting techniques to ensure success.
- Add vermiculture: worm bins.
- Provide for pollinators: plants do better with pollinators around so add flowers with different shapes and colors to attract butterflies, hummingbirds, honey bees, native bees, moths, and hoverflies. Add a puddle for butterflies. Plant parsley, dill and milkweed as food. Provide nesting boxes for native bees.
- Add a rain garden: water collectors can be anything from a slight dip made with your garden trowel to large swales created by equipment (a swale is a ditch on the contour of your site that holds water and allows it to gradually infiltrate the soil down-slope. It can be disguised as a dry creek and act to divert and direct water runoff after heavy rains. Soil and water run-off are caught in the swale which becomes a fertile area. A slope is an excellent place to integrate a swale to avoid the need to irrigate and reduce total site runoff. Place next to hard surfaces such as sidewalks, driveways and under gutters. Hardy native species are the best choices for plants, include shrubs, wild flowers, and grasses. Provide for overflow such as a culvert to move excess water to another rain garden. Loosen compacted soil to increase infiltration of water into the soil.
- Add water barrels: catch water runoff from the roof. This is considered grey water and is not for human consumption but great for watering the garden. Be aware of having an asphalt roof and find a way to filter the debris before using on your garden. The barrel should have a lid, an overflow mechanism, and a hose.
- Create permeable surfaces: use paving blocks, permeable pavements, grass driveway strips, wood decks, wood chips, and crushed rock rather than concrete or asphalt. These materials let rainwater soak through and help reduce and improve the quality of stormwater runoff.

