

## Gardening for Child Care Providers

Gardens give children a chance to try fresh fruits and vegetables and learn where food comes from. Kids who learn to love gardening at an early age grow into adults with a passion for plants and respect for the environment.

Gardens allow children:

- To be active and engaged in learning
- To build on prior learning and experiences with their environment
- To develop a relationship with nature
- To explore at their own pace

Gardens can be as small as a container garden in a window or as large as a school habitat. If you are new to gardening with preschoolers, start small and then expand as your confidence and experience increases.



### **Tips for container gardening**

- ✓ Get enough containers with drainage holes for each child. Suitable containers can be: milk cartons or jugs; paper, plastic or Styrofoam cups; egg cartons; yogurt cups; coffee cans; flour or sugar sacks.
- ✓ Fill each container with high-quality, well-drained potting soil.
- ✓ Add plant seeds. Sweet peas grow fast, smell nice, and are a good choice for a first gardening experience.
- ✓ Cover seeds lightly with more potting soil. Water.
- ✓ Place containers near a window to get enough light.
- ✓ Make sure the containers do not dry out by watering regularly.
- ✓ If you choose to grow climbing plants like tomatoes or cucumbers, provide support as the vines grow. Paint stirrers make good stakes.

### **Tips for outdoor gardens**

- ✓ Involve kids in all stages that are reasonable for their age. Work in small groups of 2 or 3 so each child is engaged and actively involved. Hands-on activities like collecting, touching, tasting, and smelling help them learn through discovery.
- ✓ Spend time preparing the soil. Most garden work can be completed with a child-sized trowel if the soil is well-prepared.
- ✓ Practice sun safety. Make sure kids use sunscreen, wear a hat, and have plenty of water to drink.
- ✓ Teach kids proper gardening behavior. They should not eat anything before asking an adult.
- ✓ Don't use pesticides or other chemicals in the garden. Be sure to check about chemicals in potting soil or seeds.
- ✓ Plant for immediate and delayed gratification. Plant both seeds and potted plants.
- ✓ Don't worry about the garden's appearance. Children will still learn from the experience and think the garden is beautiful.



Easy food plants to grow in preschool/daycare settings:

- ✓ Lettuce
- ✓ Radishes
- ✓ Snow peas
- ✓ Cherry tomatoes
- ✓ Carrots
- ✓ Potatoes
- ✓ Bush beans
- ✓ Pumpkins

Other garden ideas:

- ✓ For scent, try lemon balm, rosemary, or mint.
- ✓ Plant some edible flowers, like pansies, nasturtiums, or sunflowers
- ✓ Try planting theme gardens such as:
  - Pizza garden – tomatoes, onions, green peppers, basil, oregano
  - Stone soup garden – onions, carrots, peppers, parsnips, beans, potatoes, corn
  - Bean teepees – bamboo poles, bean or sweet pea vine

### **Helpful Resources**

- ✓ Growing a Green Generation: A curriculum of gardening activities for preschool and kindergarten children  
<http://horticulture.unh.edu/ggg.html>
- ✓ Preschool Books by Theme: Gardening with Preschoolers  
<http://books.preschoolrock.com/index.php/preschool-books-by-theme/gardening-with-preschoolers-2>
- ✓ Kidsgardening.org  
<http://Kidsgardening.org/>

*"Getting dirty is an integral part  
of growing up..."*

*Anonymous*

