



# The Greenfield Gardener

By Susan Brimo-Cox

## Share Gardening With Kids - It's Fun!

Several years ago I gave a friend's young son a packet of sunflower seeds. At home, with the help of his mother, he planted those seeds. And within about two months they were blooming. Any written description just doesn't do justice to how excited and happy he was about those huge flowers he had grown.

Gardening is a perfect activity for kids. Heck, it involves dirt. But don't make it too complicated with a lot of rules. Kids want to have fun. There's no reason why you can't have fun right along beside them.

### **Fun vegetables for kids**

Kids love weird things. When it comes to gardening there are plenty of strange and unusual vegetables to let kids grow. For younger children, large seeds are the easiest for them to handle, but don't rule out fun veggies that have small seeds.

Kids like to see something happen quickly. For something that grows fast, try radishes. They sprout within days and mature in about 30 days, depending on variety. Plus they come in different shapes and colors. For example, plant 'Easter egg' blend for red, pink and white radishes.

Tomatoes are fun for kids, too, especially cherry tomatoes or grape tomatoes—just the right size to pick off the plant and pop in your mouth. And they come in fun colors. There are yellow and orange varieties, in addition to traditional red. Start with small plants and you'll be off to a faster start.

Kids may not like to eat squash, but they come in a wide variety of shapes and sizes that appeal to youngsters. Scallop squashes look like small flying saucers. How's that for fun?

If your kids think bigger is better, and you have enough room, try 'Atlantic Giant' pumpkins. These are the super duper big ones. If you need to be conservative, 'Wee-B-Little' is a miniature pumpkin variety. 'Baby Boo' is a miniature in pure white.

Other vine vegetables good for kids are pole beans, tiny pickling cucumbers, ice box-size watermelons and small ornamental gourds.

Remember, you don't have to have a full-fledged vegetable garden to grow vegetables. Vines can grow up a trellis. Bush-type plants can be grown in containers. You can even grow potatoes in a bushel basket—blue potatoes make lavender

mashed potatoes! Or let the kids plant vegetables among the flowers in your flower bed. Just make sure the vegetables chosen won't overrun the flowers.

### **Fun flowers for kids**

Annual flowers are a good option for budding gardeners. They grow quickly and within one season. Sunflowers are at the top of the list for kids. The tall ones never cease to amaze youngsters, but don't overlook the smaller varieties, including the dwarfs that grow 3 feet tall or less.

Other popular annual flower options for kids include zinnias, cosmos, snapdragons and marigolds because they are brightly colored, fast-blooming and they make good cut flowers. Strawflowers and Statice are annuals that kids can grow and dry to keep as everlasting flowers.

Perennial plants offer a variety of flowers with interesting shapes, such as bleeding heart (*Dicentra*) and balloon flowers (*Platycodon*). Red Hot Poker (*Kniphofia*) and Blazing Star (*Liatris*) are colorful upright plants. Chinese Lanterns (*Physalis alkekengi*) and Money Plant (*Lunaria annua*) produce pods that can be used in dried arrangements.

Kids like flowers that smell good, too. Have them help you plant roses, peonies or lilacs.

But flowers and vegetables aren't the only interesting things kids find appealing in the garden. Don't forget those interesting plants that aren't known for flowers or fruits: ferns, with their feathery fronds; lambs' ears (*Stachys*), so soft to touch; and ornamental sweet potato vine (*Ipomoea batatas*), in bright char-

treuse or black.

Sharing the gardening experience with kids can be a lot of fun for both of you, even though you're likely to have to take care of some of those behind-the-scenes chores. While kids like the planting, the observing and the harvesting, they're not so keen about the weeding, watering and pest control. But, so what, relax your standards a little, let them choose what to plant and have fun!

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