

Gardening With Kids

By: Denise Everson, Family and Consumer Sciences Agent
deverson@uga.edu * 706.769.3946

Kids love to get dirty and watch things grow, so gardening is a natural activity this time of year. Having their own "bit of earth" to care for teaches so many valuable lessons - the wonder of nature and the caring of living things, not to mention environmental science and the effects that we have on our environment. But the real reason kids like gardening is because it's fun! Who doesn't want to play in the garden on a beautiful day and get their hands dirty?

- ✿ Include them in the garden planning. Kids have great ideas when it comes to gardening (and cooking all the things that come from the garden for that matter!)
- ✿ Give them a gardening area of their own. Help them determine what plants will grow best in our area, and allow them to plant whatever they want in their garden. Let them know they will need to do the watering and weeding. Giving them control of their own patch of earth teaches responsibility, as well as cause and effect.
- ✿ Give them large seeds to plant- squash, morning glories, beans and corn are all easy for little fingers to handle.
- ✿ Keep the garden kid-friendly! Don't plant anything poisonous, such as castor beans (the beans are beautiful, so they could easily be mistaken for a treat). Make paths wide so they can walk easily in the garden without falling on the plants. Don't forget to fence off areas you REALLY don't want to be accidentally stepped on. And don't forget to pick up things they could get hurt on, such as tools, discarded fencing, etc.
- ✿ Make it fun! Make a teepee out of sticks and plant red runner beans or cucumbers to grow around the teepee. This makes a great kid hideout in the summer (don't plant anything in the teepee- it will get squashed beneath the kids!) Kids also love planting sunflowers! You can make a "sunflower house" by planting the sunflowers with some space in the middle (a circle or square pattern) and then adding a roof of sticks once the sunflowers are large.
- ✿ Give them a spot to dig. If your children are too young to plant and keep their own small garden, give them an area where they can play with their dump trucks and other yard toys. Nothing will grow in the area if your children are constantly sitting or playing in it, but dirt can keep even the youngest child entertained for quite a while!
- ✿ Let them explore. Many young children love to watch bugs. Teach them to pick them up carefully, observe them, then let them go. Children can spend hours "hunting bugs" in the garden and watching them in clear jars.
- ✿ Start some gardening traditions that include the kids. You can grow pumpkins every year and carve them up on Halloween. Or try growing birdhouse gourds.

Gardening can be a great activity for families to do together. *For more information on*

gardening, contact the Oconee County Cooperative Extension Office at (706) 769-3946 or stop by our office behind the Oconee County Courthouse.