

Children's Gardens

Today we're talking about these basic things children like in a garden:

- **Doing**
- Water
- Color
- Edible things
- Cutting (well, picking) flowers
- Paths to follow
- Hiding, secret, private places
- Wildlife
- Smells
- Tactile experiences
- Special knowledge

I. Doing things in the garden: the child's point of view

A. Kids are positive

1. They like to do
2. They dislike being told what not to do

B. Adults have been conditioned to be negative:

1. Rules and regulations
 - "Don't walk on the grass"
2. Our thinking is reflected in our slogans and sayings
 - Don't rock the boat
3. Practice being positive. Make a list of things kids CAN do in your yard.
 - Please cut flowers - scissors on the hook!
 -
 -
4. Kids don't give second chances unless they have to! Listen to how you talk to them when they come to visit your garden.
 -
 -

C. Let the children DO things.

1. Plan new gardens or modify existing ones so they can participate
 - Specific tips as we go along
2. If you give them a garden bed of their own:
 - Don't interfere with its management once it's "theirs."
 - A child's own garden should be in a prime horticultural spot: good soil, sun, water

- It should also be in a visible area, where it will get lots of attention.
(Children notice whether you proudly display or hide “their” things away.)
- 3. Include them in the things that excite you the most (don't horde the fun things like picking strawberries)
- 4. Set your priorities: if you want a children's garden, settle for less than perfection in some areas
 -
 -
- 5. Child-size tools
 - Advantages and disadvantages of toy tools
 - Shovel to tractor: which ones do they need?
 - Making child-size tools
 - Suppliers of child-size tools

D. And make gardening fun, not a chore

1. Accept their help if they offer it, don't assign garden chores
2. Talk to them about the plants or tell plant stories while you work together. This holds their interest, and they'll stay longer and longer.

II. Water in the garden: the sure-fire draw. Or is it?

A. Wading and splashing must be allowed

B. Moving water is the biggest thrill

1. Waterfalls
2. Fountain birdbaths
3. Multiple hoses, with spray guns
4. Water balloons and squirt guns on hand

C. Helping to build a pool, waterfall or even a birdbath is a winner

1. Picking out the materials
 - Catalogs vs. stores
 - Opportunity to learn: budgets, choosing for quality, and more
2. Deciding where the water should be
 - Discussing WHY they want it in a certain place
 - Opportunity to learn: hypotheses and evaluation of experiments
3. Limited involvement is fine, too
 - Filling it up, turning it on, etc.

D. Some hints about pools and kids

- 32 mil liners or preformed liners safeguard against rips, punctures
- falling in: fencing across the pool, just under the surface of the water
- Pool alarms

III. Colors - some like it bright, others like it brighter

A. Annuals and warm colors are for kids

1. Fast and big: Reds, yellows and oranges attract them
2. Cool colors and interesting others (perennials) sustain the interest
3. Thinking about color when you plant the garden
 - Warm colors can draw from a distance
 - Cool colors should stay near sitting areas

B. Natural-born decorators

- Allow plants to be moved when combinations suggest themselves

IV. Edible things

A. Teaching children to respect nature

- Good stories to illustrate the power of plants that can heal and kill

B. Growing food that can be eaten without washing

1. Are insecticides, fungicides, etc. necessary?
2. Keeping dirt off of low-growing foods
 - Alternatively: how to insure that the child washes the food

C. Fruit vs. vegetable...vs. flowers

1. What makes fruits so attractive?
2. What makes vegetables so hard to swallow?
3. Difference between fruits and vegetables in the garden/in the house
4. Why are edible flowers so neat?

V. Cutting (picking!) flowers

A. The rewards of encouraging children to cut flowers

B. Teaching them to pick (cut!) without killing

C. Cutting without hurting themselves

1. About bees
2. Opening the mind by opening the eyes: thorns, prickles and such
3. Good tools for children: safety scissors and wire snips

D. Easy rules

- Take every flower except the only or last flower
- Cut a long stalk as long as there are lots of leaves left
- Water "up to its neck" right away

VI. Paths to follow

A. Laying out the path

1. Desirable destinations - what kids desire
2. Thinking as an adult: the pitfalls of square corners and logical routes
3. Looking at realities before placing a flower bed or a path
 - Winter: a great time to see traffic patterns
 - Trialing the path first: the wonders of a string border
 - Width of paths: working paths, main paths
 - Reaching distances

B. Surfacing the path

1. Grass, the "sole" solution
2. Some alternatives, their plusses and minuses
 - Wood chips
 - Gravel
 - Sand
 - Dirt
 - Flagstone

C. Maintaining paths

1. Weeds
2. Over the years: settling, heaving
3. During the seasons: encroaching plants
4. Edging

VII. Hiding, secret, private places

A. What was the attraction in Aunt Mel's lilacs?

B. The right size place for a kid to hide or be alone

C. Creature comforts

1. Sitting
2. Stashing treasures
3. Avoiding bugs
4. Out of the elements: a roof in a natural hiding place?

D. Handling with the consequences of kids IN the garden

1. Can you afford the time to smile?
2. Helping plants live around soil compaction
3. Rx for broken branches
4. Avoiding broken treasures and broken hearts

VIII. Wildlife

A. Good bugs, bad mammals: teaching respect of living things

B. Opportunities in observation

1. What's that bug/animal doing?!: sparks to the imagination
2. Children as natural research specialists: providing tools and methods
3. Experiments, show-n-tell, collections

C. Attracting the wildlife kids want

1. Links: certain plants support certain wild things
2. The three-part law: food, water, shelter
3. Involving the kids in attracting wildlife

D. Humbling experiences

- When even Mom can't fix it
- Wild pets, delicate balances: special diets, population density, etc.
-
-

IX. Smells

A. The unconscious lure

B. Making children aware of their sense of smell

1. A good nose is born and then lost!
2. Getting in touch with what the nose knows
 - Smells in the open air, smells in small spaces
 - Good times for smelling: dawn/dusk, windless times
 - Games: the smell safari, the blind box
3. Preserving smells: drying for scent, making perfume

X. Tactile experiences

A. Touching!

- Not just soft things
- Not just with the fingers

XI. Special knowledge

A. The pride of knowing

B. What makes a fact special? Atmosphere!

C. Where does special knowledge come from? Learning about plants:

-
-

C. Helping the child hold on to special knowledge: Memory devices

- Rhymes
- Alliteration
- Visual cues

XI. Where can I learn more about gardening with children?

A. Seeing it in action:

- U of M's Matthei Botanical Gardens, Dixboro road east of Ann Arbor
- Metropark Nature Centers: Kensington, Stoney Creek, Indian Springs

B. Books

C. Mail-order garden suppliers

A great start: Plants for children

The plant	Its attraction:						doing/special knowledge
	color	eating	cutting	to hide	wildlife	scent	
Achillea spp. (yarrow,woundwort)	x		x				its name from Achilles
Alchemilla (Lady's Mantle)			x				its name from alchemist
Allium spp. (chives, flowering onion)		x				x	<u>that's</u> an onion?!
Anaphalis spp. (pearly everlasting)			x		x		painted lady butterfly
Anemone spp. (windflower)	x		x				
Antennaria dioica (pussy toes)							I know why it's called that!
Anthemis tinctoria (golden Marguerite)	x		x				
Aquilegia spp. (Columbine) name=doves	x		x		x		hummingbird;
Arenaria caespitosa (Irish moss)							feeling it, walking on it
Armeria maritima (sea pink)			x				I can sit on it: lady cushion
Artemisia spp. (wormwood)						x	
Asarum spp. (ginger)							why flower is hidden low
Asclepias spp. (milkweed, butterfly weed)	x		x		x	x	butterflies
Aster	x		x				name means star
Aurinia saxatilis (perennial. alyssum)	x					x	"madwort" for mad dog
Balsam/Touch me not	x		x				I know to touch seed pods
Begonia	x		x				
Belamcanda (Blackberry lily)			x				why named, Sept. seeds
Bergenia (pigsqueak)			x				how to squeak it
Brussel Sprout		x					where the sprouts grow
Calendula (Pot marigold)	x	x	x				edible flower
Celosia /Cockscomb	x		x				old name: Prince's Feather
Chelone obliqua (Turtlehead)			x		x		name; Baltimore butterfly
Convallaria majalis (lily of valley)			x			x	
Cosmos	x		x				I planted that big thing!
Crocus	x		x				
Dahlia	x		x				I know to store the root
Dianthus spp. (pinks, carnations)	x		x			x	
Dicentra spp. (Bleeding heart)			x				why named lady in a bath
Erianthus (ravenna grass)				x			
Flowering cabbage	x						
Gomphrena / Globe amaranth	x		x				prickly feel of flowers
Heuchera spp. (coral bells)	x		x		x		hummingbirds
Hibiscus moscheutos (hardy hibiscus)	x		x	x			roots for marshmallow
Lavandula spp. (Lavender)			x			x	
Lobelia cardinalis (Cardinal flower)	x		x				I see the cardinal
Money plant come	x		x				knowing the pods will
Monkey flower	x		x				I see the monkey face
Lychnis spp. (rose campion, others)	x		x				
Miscanthus spp (maiden grass)				x	x		
Peanuts		x					where the peanuts grow
Peas		x					
Snapdragon	x		x				I can snap: dragon mouth
Strawberry		x					
Strawflower	x		x				crisp papery feel of flowers
Sunflower		x	x			x	rapid growth
Sweet alyssum	x					x	I can grow it from seed
Violets	x	x	x				