

Raising a New Crop of Gardeners

A child's fascination with nature is inherent; we are all born as potential gardeners. However, in a high-tech society filled with television, video games and other distractions, that natural interest can easily be muted until ultimately it disappears. Many times, all we need to do as parents, teachers or friends of young children to pique their interest in gardening is expose them to it.

Even a very young child can experience the joy of a garden. Create a space where children can play using structures such as bean teepees or sunflower houses. Grow plants that are fun to harvest and recruit the child's help in digging up potatoes, pulling carrots and picking strawberries. Choose plants that appeal to a child's senses - herbs and flowers for smell, fruits and vegetables for taste, and perennials such as lamb's ear, silver mound and hens & chicks for touch.

When a child is old enough, allot a small space that they can make into their own garden. Suggest easy-to-grow crops, such as beans, radishes or lettuce, for a child's first garden. It's easy to take too much control over your little one's project because you want to be sure they succeed, but try to resist that urge. By steering them in the direction of simple things at first and giving them a hand when they need it, you will be helping them do much more than grow flowers and vegetables. Once they get the hang of it, gardening is something they can do on their own, boosting their self-confidence and giving them a sense of accomplishment. You may be surprised to find that before long *they* have suggestions for *you*.

Gardening with children opens up a world of opportunities for learning. Their experience can lead to a better understanding and appreciation of the arts and sciences and can foster patience, kindness and a nurturing spirit. Your time together in the garden will open the child's eyes to so many new areas of interest including insects, birds, soil, weather, cooking and nutrition. If you're having trouble getting your little one to eat vegetables, working together in the garden can help broaden their palate. Vegetables grown by a child are much better tasting to them and they're likely to try new things.

Gardening with your children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews, or small friends is a wonderful way to spend time with them while sharing one of your joys and talents with the next generation. It can become a kind of legacy in a family. Community gardens give those in the city, or those who don't have space, the opportunity to share this wonderful gift.

Give the child in your life a chance to develop a love of gardening. They will enjoy it for the same reasons you do, and perhaps give you more reasons to spend time in your garden.

For More Information on Capital District Community Gardens' programs or to make a tax-deductible donation contact:



**40 River Street, Troy, NY 12180
518.274.8685 CDCG@juno.com
www.cdcg.org**