

# Gardening with Kids (and with pleasure)

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A quick internet search will bring up a whole range of ideas and activities for gardening with kids. But what about you? As parents, time for personal hobbies is slim and precious. We know, especially as we spend more time at home, that making time for—and enjoying—the things that are important to us helps us be better parents. It's also important to model a healthy balance of necessary work and hobbies for our children. We want them to see us making time for things we enjoy and taking pleasure in the work that we do. Whether we're experienced gardeners with a growing family or an established family learning something new, the fact remains that gardening takes time and energy and both of those things are non-renewable resources.



Sometimes it's helpful to take a moment and remember why gardening is important to us. A few of the reasons I garden are because it makes me happy and is my preferred form of exercise. I also garden because I like my yard to look nice for people passing by and be a pleasant place to spend time. I want my yard to benefit insects and other wildlife while limiting mower and chemical use. These are all achievable goals but I have adjusted my expectations a bit as our family grows.

- Zone your yard. Divide your gardening space into zones based on the amount of time they require, establishing high priority areas that will get the most attention (front landscaping, entertaining area, etc.) and low priority areas to clean up every couple weeks or as time allows. Don't forget to leave an area for free play and/or a garden area where your children can take some responsibility, depending on their age and interest.
- Stick to the job at hand. When you head out to the garden, set an achievable goal. You may not have time to weed the whole garden but can you pull all the weeds in two square feet? Once you've set a goal, stay on task. It's easy to get distracted and overwhelmed by other things once you're kneeling on the ground but you can always move onto the next thing if you finish the first task.
- Make the most of little moments. Letting the dog out? Pick a bouquet while you wait for him to do his business. Taking the trash out? Pull a couple big weeds on your way back. Toddler got distracted by a leaf on the way inside? Scatter some seedheads while she explores.
- Multitask. If you set aside time each day for exercise, make gardening the workout a couple times a week. According to the CDC, 30-45 minutes of yard work burns around 300 calories and most gardening activities are great muscle builders. Gardens are also an ideal place for mindfulness activities, whether you're meditating or praying, try spending that time outside with your hands in the soil.
- Make it a Date. There will always be bigger projects that are nice to get done all at once—like preparing a new planting bed, building a patio or seasonal cleanup. If both parents enjoy gardening, these projects make a fun and unique date activity. Send the kids to Grandma's or on a playdate and spend some time working together. Working side by side with a visible accomplishment at the end can be a valuable bonding experience.
- Take time to enjoy your work. Plan a picnic, camp in the yard, watch the birds, hunt for insects or designate one night a week to eat outside. Showing your family the fun side of having a nice garden will help them understand why it's a priority to you and may help them develop their own interest and pleasure in working outdoors.

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