

How to Make Gardening a Family Affair

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Gardening offers so many benefits. It can put some extra food on the table, offer nutritious foods for your family's good health, and it can be a fun hobby, too. Not only can it be a great activity for one person, but it can also be a bonding experience for the whole family to do together.

When you involve your loved ones in gardening, it also lightens the workload of one person having to prepare and care for a garden, and it will give your family time to support each other, offer praise, and share excitement – all in a peaceful setting without the intrusion of electronics.

It's easy to get your whole family involved in creating and maintaining a sustainable garden. Your spouse and children can help take care of the garden as a whole - with everyone working side by side, or you can split up portions of the garden into different sections and rotate it among family members so that each person spends time helping another person in your family.

Why Gardening Is Good for the Family

Gardening isn't just a good hobby. You can learn a lot of different things through gardening, including self-sufficiency. When you involve your family in the process of growing their own fruits and vegetables, you'll be helping them learn many useful things that can benefit them now as well as later on in life.

When your family gardens, everyone will have to learn which fruits and vegetables are best grown in the spring and summer, and which ones are best grown in the fall. You can give everyone a lesson on planting zones and how to choose which produce grows best in your area.

You also learn how weather can affect plants, how water and sunshine help the plant to grow, and what bugs are attracted to certain plants. These facts will interest teens as well as younger kids.

You can learn more than just the facts and benefits of plants for food. When you garden with your family, you can learn other uses for a plant. For instance, some of them have been used in history to treat certain health issues.

Teach them that the basil they're growing can help treat headaches. Let them know that the lavender they see sprouting up is something that can help calm and soothe them after a stressful day, even helping them sleep better at night!

As you work with your family to plant and care for a garden, let them learn which fruits and vegetables work best with certain dishes and which ones they like most. You don't want to plant something you'll never eat.

Gardening is also a great way to explore and learn new foods to try that you'll like. If you're first starting out, use fruits and vegetables that are easy to grow, such as beets, carrots, cucumbers, snap peas, and blackberries.

Once you've been gardening for a while, don't be afraid to experiment with different fruits and vegetables. Mix up your garden to create some color and variety. Have fun letting others in your family choose what to plant in the garden.

Teens and younger kids will especially enjoy having this choice. Another benefit of gardening is getting to watch your kids become self-confident when they learn to grow a vegetable or fruit on their own.

You'll also get to see your child become more responsible as they take care to water the plants and pull weeds to help the garden grow. Let your family members each be responsible for their own fruits and vegetables.

Allow them to learn and to research the care that different types of plants need. Gardening can also help open up communication. If you have older kids and teenagers, it can be hard to communicate with them.

If you have them help you in the garden, it creates a time you can spend with them one on one – without friends texting them or the TV blaring in the background. Sometimes, all it takes is doing an activity together to help strengthen family bonds.

Not only does gardening help with communication, but it also opens your family up to having something they all share. It helps bring the family together and adds closeness.

This works the same with your spouse.

If you both work, time with each other can be limited. But having something that you both take care of together can offer a time for communication as well as a fun hobby. Just keep in mind that different family members will enjoy certain tasks more.

While you might enjoy pulling weeds, another family member might not be so thrilled with it. Make sure to split up the tasks so no one gets stuck doing something he or she hates.

Getting the Kids Involved

It isn't always easy to get the kids to help around the house or work outside. Gardening can be a great way to change that. Let your entire family be involved from start to finish. If you're starting a garden from scratch, it's a good idea to include your family members when picking a spot for the garden.

This will help them feel needed in the garden and will get them excited at the thought of planting. Make sure you involve the kids when you're picking out most of the fruits and vegetables to grow.

While you may choose something more useful, or a vegetable everyone in the family will eat, younger kids will enjoy a variety of plants. Some kids can have fun picking brightly colored fruits and vegetables.

Bell peppers are great for small children because they're some of the easiest vegetables to grow. Radishes are also very easy to grow and brightly colored. Snow peas are another great crop to garden with kids.

Both radishes and snow peas grow during the cool seasons. Kids tend to enjoy fruits more than vegetables, so strawberries, raspberries, and blueberries are great choices. Others may like getting fruits and vegetables that are more unique and that they aren't used to seeing daily.

Also, you can look into miniature vegetables, like baby carrots and potatoes, baby cauliflower, and baby lettuce. These are perfect for little hands and they come in a variety of colors.

Baby vegetables are perfect for helping your child feel more confident when working in the garden because they're easier. You don't want to overwhelm him or her by starting with large fruits and vegetables that may be more difficult to care for.

Be careful that you don't overwhelm your family if you're someone who's been gardening for a while. Keep in mind that a medium sized garden to you can seem huge to a child and a large garden can seem like it's a daunting task to someone who isn't used to it.

If your children are very young, you can assign them each their own "spots" or "plants" in the garden. This way, you can look over them, but they'll be learning how to water and care for a vegetable or fruit on their own.

As your children get older, you can expand their garden spaces so they're growing more plants. Make sure as the space expands, your children know how to grow a wide variety of fruits and vegetables.

You can also broaden their cultural knowledge by planting fruits and vegetables that are used in different ethnic meals. You can introduce your family to several different vegetables when growing them.

Experimenting with different dishes is a great way to have some fun with your family. Your kids will enjoy picking out new dinners based on the foods that were grown in the garden.

Aside from picking out the seeds to plant, your family can help with the preparation. Kids especially like this part. Most kids would love to help with getting the soil ready for planting.

Digging is usually a kid's favorite part of working outside, but don't limit him to just working in the dirt. Kids are very resourceful and will enjoy learning about and working in all parts of the garden.

If your children are very young, make sure to let them know they're doing a great job whenever they're working. It will help them feel more confident about what they're doing.

Children can also help plant the seeds and water the fruits and vegetables as they grow. If your children are little, you can purchase tiny plastic watering cans so they're able to water the plants along with you.

You can also keep a small corner of the garden for growing flowers along with the food items that your family chooses to use. Marigolds are great for gardens because they're low maintenance and easy to care for.

Whatever flower you decide on, make sure it's non-toxic if you're gardening with small kids. When planting and caring for a garden, remember that while you know better, if you're working with younger ones, they might not realize that they can't put things into their mouth from the garden.

Some vegetable tops can make a child sick. So make sure they understand the importance of not eating out of the garden unless it's an appropriate food item and has been washed first.

Have the Family Help with Every Step

It may seem easier to do some of the harder steps by yourself - especially if you've had some experience gardening and can get it done faster. However, it's important that the others in your family also know how to do all of the steps.

They're more likely to appreciate the end result more when they've been involved every step of the way. Also, if they only know the easy steps, they won't know everything they need to know to begin their own garden.

By letting your family help in every step, they learn all the basics of gardening. They also learn the tips like when the best time is to plant certain seeds and what type of fruits and vegetables are the easiest to grow.

They'll learn how to prepare the soil and how to test it to make sure that it's ready for growing things. Your family will enjoy telling friends that they know how to

garden. Many of the fruits and vegetables can be harvested and then canned or frozen.

You can share them that way or in their fresh from the garden state with family or friends. Giving a basket full of freshly grown food to someone can also teach your family about the importance of sharing and giving.

When the family is working in the garden, especially when it's gardening with children, you want to make sure that they're actually working in the gardening that time. You want to check on them, but you also want to make sure that you're giving them the freedom to learn and make discoveries on their own.

It can be easy to hover over them and tell them what to do every step of the way. However, that should only be done the first few times you work in the garden together.

If you continually hover, your child won't learn how to work on his own and his accomplishment at having grown fruits and vegetables won't be "just his."

It's important that you teach your child every step, make sure he or she understands, and then let him work on his own. If you're worried that your child won't remember to do certain things in the garden, you can make a colorful calendar for him.

Mark the days when he needs to water the plants or pull weeds. This way, you don't have to continually remind him and he feels as though he's accomplishing something on his own.

If you're working in the garden with your husband or wife, remember that everyone has a way they like to do things. This can bring a fun and unique twist to gardening as a family.

Keep in mind that even though the garden might be hard work, it should still be something that all of you find fun and enjoy doing together. One of the ways that you can make sure your family enjoys gardening is to make sure that you do what you can to have fun.

Make It Fun

Composting can be a fun project with a garden for adults or kids. Even though it does require some patience and effort, it's something that kids will enjoy getting to help with. If you have depleted soil, you can give it back vitality by using compost.

You can make compost at home, and it's a good thing to use in the soil you're using to grow fruits and vegetables. You can get everyone involved in helping save the household waste that can go into the composting pile instead of into the garbage can.

Your family can learn how composting helps the garden by helping the soil retain moisture so that plants get the water that they need. Kids can learn how to tell when a compost pile is ready and which containers are best or easiest to use when creating a compost pile.

Gardening can be a fun family project when you allow your children to decorate their designated spaces in the garden. They can decorate with little plastic butterflies or birds.

You can let your child plant a fairy garden somewhere in their garden, and there are kits to help you do this. They can also use small decorative lights in the garden. Just make sure they're placed far enough away from the plants so nothing hinders their growth.

Another fun thing that you can do is to make sure that every family member has his or her own gardening tools. Kids especially love this idea. You can even get a gardening bag that's monogrammed with his or her name on it.

Child sized rakes, shovels, watering cans and hoes are good items to get, especially if the children are small - because they won't be able to use many of the standard gardening tools.

When they have their own tools, they'll feel more involved in the process. Plus, child size gardening tools also come in fun colors, which will help make it more interesting for your child.

They're also much safer for small children to use than standard adult size gardening tools. Encourage your child to learn how to take care of his tools. How to clean them and then keep them safely stored with yours until the next time they're needed.

By teaching your child about the joy of gardening, they're more likely to enjoy healthier food later in life. Gardening will also open your child up to a variety of different fruits and vegetables to choose from when it comes to eating.

Instead of having to eat standard vegetables, your child can try more exotic and unique ones. This is a good way to get your child to eat vegetables. Many times kids don't like standard vegetables like Brussel sprouts and corn, but if you introduce them to different ones, they may be more open to eating them.

The fun doesn't have to stop when the garden items are harvested, either. You can teach your child how to make their favorite dishes with the vegetables and fruits that they grew.

If you have a lot of berries, you can also teach your child how to make jam. Or tasty smoothies using fresh fruit from the garden. Not only can gardening help create time together, but you'll also be eating healthier as a family.



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