



CHILDREN, NATURE AND GARDENS

Many parents can agree that if children spend too much time indoors they simply go crazy. They turn into little monsters, going into drawers they are not supposed to open, running around and falling because the floor is too slippery, not listening if you tell them to slow down, climbing on things that are not made for climbing (lucky our cupboards are bolted to the walls) and becoming irritated and cranky.

The only solution is to take them outside. It's the fresh air, the space, the natural environment with its different shapes, surfaces, textures, colours and smells that has a calming effect, not only on children, but the parents too.

Children can learn new skills, have fun, play and develop self-confidence by spending time in the garden, tending plants and growing their own food. Most children enjoy being outdoors and love digging in the soil, getting dirty, creating things from natural materials, playing games and watching plants grow.

In this NRC and Community Nursery Theme edition, we will explore the benefits of gardening for children, what native plants are great 'beginners' plants and easy to grow from seed as well as some interesting ideas of what to do in the garden like games, nature journaling, plant and animal ID and nature craft.

GARDENING WITH CHILDREN

Why is it so good for them?

People of all ages can enjoy gardening, but children in particular will have lots of fun and gain special benefits. Gardening is educational and develops new skills including:

- Responsibility – from caring for plants
- Self-confidence – from achieving their goals and enjoying the food they have grown
- Love of nature – a chance to learn about the outdoor environment in a safe and pleasant place
- Understanding – as they learn about cause and effect (for example, plants die without water, weeds compete with plants)
- Reasoning and discovery – learning about the science of plants, animals, weather, the environment, nutrition and simple construction
- Physical activity – doing something fun and productive
- Cooperation – including shared play activity and teamwork
- Creativity – finding new and exciting ways to grow food
- Nutrition – learning about where fresh food comes from.

GARDENING WITH CHILDREN

How to get them involved

Some suggestions to get children involved and interested in creating a garden include:

- Keep it simple.
- Give children their own garden space. (This does not have to be big. You can start with a large container or a few pots.)
- Involve older children in the planning and design of the garden.
- Use lightweight, easy-to-handle, correct-sized tools and garden equipment.
- Encourage children to dig in the dirt. (Younger children love making mud pies)
- Grow interesting plants such as sunflowers, corn, pumpkins, tomatoes and strawberries.
- Use a trellis or teepee to grow beans or sweet peas.
- Plant flowers that attract butterflies, ladybirds and other interesting insects or birds.
- Make a scarecrow.
- Install a water feature, a birdbath or a sundial.
- Set up a worm farm.
- Visit community gardens, children's farms or botanic gardens for ideas.



Source: Elisha Brunton

GARDENING WITH CHILDREN

Child safety in the Garden



- Select the correct-sized tool.
- Keep sprays and fertilisers out of reach.
- Do not use chemicals. Garden organically whenever possible.
- Provide safe storage for equipment and tools.
- Secure fences and gates.
- Provide shade in summer with umbrellas or shade cloth.
- Make sure that where it's appropriate, children wear a hat, sunscreen, suitable clothing and gumboots.
- Do not leave buckets of water unattended around very young children and toddlers.

GARDENING WITH CHILDREN

Plant Selection

Children like large, brightly coloured flowers and vegetables that grow quickly. Plants such as sunflowers, tomatoes, corn and pumpkins are good examples.

In our Community Nursery are plants that are non toxic and require little water and maintenance. That makes them perfect to create a little garden for children.

You should also consider using varieties of plants that have sensory and textural qualities as well. Examples of great sensory plants include:

- Touch – woolly lamb's ear or woolly bush, succulents (such as salt bush and pig face), bottlebrush species, snapdragons, paper flowers
- Taste – salt bush, basil, strawberries, peas, rosemary, carrots, cherry tomatoes
- Smell – eucalyptus, correas, jasmine, sweet peas, lavender, pelargoniums, native mint bush, lemon balm
- Bright colour – goodenias, daffodils, rainbow chard, marigolds, pansies, sunflowers
- Sound – corn, bamboo and grasses rustle against each other when the wind blows.



GARDENING WITH CHILDREN

Different Activities for Different Ages

Toddlers, preschoolers, primary-school-aged and older children will all have different expectations and will learn different things in the garden.

Younger children will require careful supervision during activities. Suitable tasks for younger children include watering plants, harvesting produce and planting seeds.

Older children are physically capable of handling a greater variety of activities, like digging, carrying, planting, mulching and pruning.

Choose activities that suit the child's age. Suggestions include:

- Watering the garden
- Digging
- Picking flowers
- Planting vegetables, fruits and flowers in the correct season
- Feeding the worms and using the 'worm tea' from the worm farm as fertilizer
- Picking vegetables and fruits when they are ready to eat
- Preparing healthy food, such as making salads and preparing school lunches
- Craft activities using harvested seeds, plants and flowers
- Composting, recycling and mulching
- Weeding
- Gathering seeds and dried flowers
- Deadheading flowers



NATURE CRAFT ACTIVITIES

Using natural materials

Children are like sponges when it comes to learning new things and helping them create something with natural materials is great fun and makes them really proud.

There is about 50 000 craft ideas to choose from and with a quick search online there is something for everyone. We have provided just a few ideas that are very simple and are free or cost next to nothing.



Mandala

A quick search in the garden, park or out 'bush' will provide enough materials for this easy task. If using a plate for a small mandala or doing it on the ground, there is no limit. Materials can include different coloured sands, gravel, rocks, sticks, nuts and seeds, leaves, bark and flowers.



Decorations

This is a hard one because there are just so many possibilities. Using a piece of cardboard as a base is a start and whatever shape you want to cut out, they all will look great. Some ideas are: hearts, trees, butterflies, a wreath, stars and many more. Once the base is finished you can use glue to stick on leaves and flowers collected from outside. This is a great gift idea for friends and family.



Rock or Log Painting

Elisha from our Bush Playgroup created this piece of art but of course, there is no limit to your imagination. Go out and about and collect either rocks or smaller pieces of wood (you will find it hard to carry a big log like the one in the picture but maybe you have one in your back yard). Grab some non toxic paint or even just chalk and create little bugs, participate in with SA Rocks or paint any artwork you can think of. Rocks that will be placed outside will need a clear weatherproof coating.



NATURE ACTIVITIES

Using natural materials



Again, there are many options to use natural materials to create an unforgettable time outdoors. How about trying some of the activities below?

Bush Bingo

Grab your egg carton and see how many interesting colours and shapes you can gather from your backyard. When you've filled up your tray you can shout 'BUSH BINGO!'

Option 1: Colour each cup with a different texture or paint and try to find a rainbow

Option 2: Use the list below to find different shapes and textures.

- A red leaf
- A gumnut
- A yellow flower
- A heart shaped leaf
- A feather
- A pink flower
- A seed pod
- A brown leaf
- A rough piece of bark
- A white flower
- A long leaf
- A purple flower
- A stone
- Some dirt or sand
- An orange flower
- A gum nut
- A curly leaf
- A red flower

Cooking Wombat Stew

Another easy exercise, very popular with our Bush Playgroup. Collecting materials from the garden and cooking up a feast.



But wait, there is more...

Other ideas include, creating a feel path, like the one we have at the Bushgardens; a nature and/or activities trail where children have to climb or jump over logs, crawl through a tunnel made from vines, throw large seed pods into buckets and balance over stepping stones.

Everything can be adapted to suit different ages and older children can try Nature Journaling, Bird watching, Plant and Animal Identification.

It is not up to the educators and teachers to teach our children the connection we have with our environment. It is up to the parents to guide them into this world and show them a path that is sustainable and healthy. Being out in nature is the only way they can learn to respect and protect it and it helps them become resilient young people.

References:

Victoria State Government - Better Health Channel

<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/HealthyLiving/gardening-for-children>

Elisha Brunton - Barossa Bushgardens Bush Playgroup

Recommended Resources:

Playgroup SA

<https://www.playgroupsa.com.au>

Children and Nature Network

<https://www.childrenandnature.org>



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Opening hours:

Monday and Friday by appointment

Tuesday & Thursday

9 am - 4 pm

Wednesday

9 am - 12.30 pm

Saturday and Sunday closed



**Government
of South Australia**

Northern and Yorke
Landscape Board



The Barossa Council