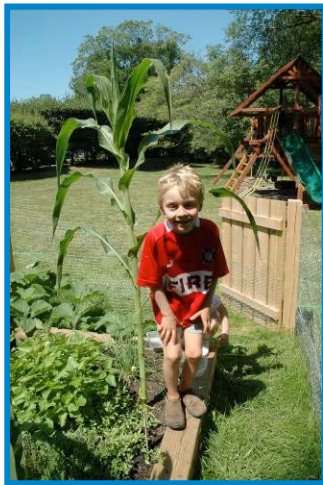




READY, SET, GROW! 10 Tips for Gardening with Kids

Jeanne Pinsof Nolan, “The Organic Gardener,” works with families to create and maintain organic vegetable gardens. She helps families by teaching them the importance of eating the vegetables they grow. As a mom, she knows first-hand that getting kids to eat vegetables isn’t always an easy task. Jeanne helped her own daughter love her veggies by encouraging her to get her hands dirty in the garden. Gardening can be done anywhere, anytime and Jeanne has some great tips for how to get kids excited about vegetables from the garden to the plate:

- **It’s American:** For those feeling inspired by the First Lady’s vegetable victory garden project, use this as an opportunity to teach kids about current events and the importance of healthy eating. Home-grown vegetables are yummy, crunchy, juicy, aromatic and flavorful, and children love to pick them right from the garden.



- **Food for Thought:** Just like our bodies need nutrients from vegetables to grow strong and stay healthy, vegetables need nutrients from the ground. As you fill your vegetable plots, beds or pots with soil and fertilizer, let your kids know that it’s the food their vegetables need to grow into something they can eat.
- **Vegetables in Living Color:** When determining what to plant, always go for color – kids love it, and your garden will be beautiful. Many people don’t know that string beans come in green, purple and yellow, which make for a fun and colorful harvesting experience. Radishes come in pink, red, white or purple and you can use them all in a fresh, bright and delicious summer salad.

- **Stake Their Claim:** Gardening gives kids a sense of ownership. Allocate a section of your plot or a special pot specifically for the kids. Have them choose which vegetables to plant and take the lead on maintaining this section of the garden. At harvest time, let your kids choose recipes to cook that feature the vegetables. Get them involved in the meal preparation. They will feel a great sense of satisfaction knowing the family is enjoying *their* vegetables at the dinner table.





- **Role Play:** Assign kids different jobs in the garden that appeal to their particular interests. Some will like to take the creative route writing and decorating plant markers, while others will enjoy getting physical by preparing the soil. Distributing responsibilities will help them feel like they're playing an important role in the complete gardening process.
- **Let's Get Physical:** Since gardening is a physical activity, it's a great way to get kids moving while taking part in nature and learning new things. A child can burn around 100 calories¹ in one hour of light gardening – planting seeds, watering, harvesting vegetables, etc. – depending on age, gender and weight.
- **Explore the Market:** Take your kids with you to the farmers' market – they are so much fun to explore and can really become an all-day activity. Explain to kids that the farmers grew their vegetables just like you're doing at home, and make sure to try enjoying a post-shopping snack of the fresh vegetables you find at the market dipped in some ranch dressing. The veggies you bring home can serve as inspiration for trying new recipes, especially ones that the kids can help with in the kitchen.
- **Plant the Seeds of Knowledge:** The fall and winter months are not usually ideal for getting the 6-8 hours of sunlight needed for a successful outdoor – or indoor – garden. Use this time to review seed catalogues with your children to plan the vegetables you will grow in the garden come spring.
- **Gardening 101:** Work with the principal and teachers to get a school garden started. Kids at all grade levels will be able to take part – and pride – in this hands-on project. Teachers can also work gardening and nutrition lessons into the classroom curriculum.
- **Back to Nature:** Most children suffer from “Nature Deficit Disorder” – not spending enough time outdoors and experiencing nature first-hand. Children are the future of a sustainable world, and by gardening they get to be stewards of small parcels of the earth. Plus, gardening allows for quality family time and a chance for teaching lessons on being environmentally aware. Families looking for ways to decrease their carbon footprint and offset global warming can take pride in knowing that growing their own food is one of the best ways to do this on a personal level.



¹ Adapted from: “Physical Activity in Middle School-aged Children Participating in a School-Based Recreation Program” by C. Lawrence Kien, MD, PhD; Andrew R. Chioldo, MA (Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med. 2003;157:811-815.)