
Cultivating the seeds of awareness with children's gardens: Daron Joffe and Josh Eisenberg create enchanted gardens for kids - Brief Article

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Every flower of every tomorrow is in the seeds of today.--Chinese Proverb

Gardens are a wonderful way for children to learn how to work with each other and the natural world. Integrating a garden into a school, camp, religious institution, community center or home will enhance the atmosphere and opportunities for learning, while fostering a better understanding of creation. Hands-on learning experiences in the garden foster ecological awareness and encourage children to eat fresh vegetables. In our technological world, a child generally has no idea where the food in the refrigerator comes from or how it was grown. However, when a child digs in the dirt, plants a seed, nurtures that seed, and harvests what they grow, he or she will take pride in eating that vegetable, understanding the energy it took the plant to go from seed to plant to flower to fruit. Eating local organic produce provides children with the vital nutrients they need, while intimately connecting them to their food source.

The joy of growing plants from seed to seed can be a vibrant source of inspiration for children. Gardens engage and captivate children in activities reflective of the season, geographical location, and traditions of different cultures. The uniqueness of each locale will largely determine the exact garden designs, horticulture activities, arts and recreation projects, and community-wide celebrations for each program.

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Theme gardens are a great way to get children involved in the garden. For example, a nutrition garden may be designed in the shape of an 'A', which could be planted in vegetables that are high in vitamin A, such as broccoli and carrots. A creative gardener can source out seeds for unique varieties like purple carrots, romanesco broccoli, and other exciting vegetables one cannot find in grocery stores. Another great theme garden is the pizza garden, which sparkles with plump tomatoes, sweet basil, thyme, oregano, bell peppers and red onions. It is even possible to build a cob oven to cook pizzas on-site. A cob oven is not too difficult to build and makes a great activity for children ages 10-16.

A favorite garden spectacle to many is the sunflower house, which is simply built by planting a square area with an open center for children to congregate under the majestic sunflowers. Another fun garden structure is the bean tunnel and teepee. This is made by arching a wire mesh and planting beans along the bottoms. It makes a great entrance for children as it is just the right height for

them, and only them, to squeeze through. This is connected to a large bamboo teepee with pole beans, gourds and other climbing plants covering it. These spaces create a cozy learning environment where a teacher can focus the children's energy before engaging in an activity.

Gardens serve as a living classroom where children learn about plants, food, nutrition, animals, endangered species, solar energy, and the web of life. Hands-on activities involve kids in digging soil, sowing seeds, transplanting, mulching, cultivating, harvesting, and learning to identify, plants and insects. The children are able to take what they have grown and learn to make fun foods such as pizza, salsa, and jams. These products can be donated or sold to help generate income and publicity for the garden, or just for fun.

The garden can also serve as a sanctuary for physically and mentally disabled children. Providing beneficial hands-on activities empower the child while also engaging them in physically and mentally challenging exercises. When designing an enabling garden, it is important to consider different disabilities and provide appropriate amenities such as wheelchair access, raised beds, and hanging wall gardens. Sensory gardens utilize specific plants to foster an interactive garden experience. Children with and without sight can smell the fragrances of different flowers, herbs and vegetables. They can taste, smell, feel, and hear the diversity of life in a vibrant garden.

Children involved in the garden are given the opportunity to express themselves in positive ways. By engaging and witnessing the garden's therapeutic rhythms, children develop a sense of respect and reverence for themselves and the interconnectedness of life. A children's garden provides the skills and understanding necessary for healing and protecting the world we live in. Through a hands-on gardening experience, children begin to appreciate and become more aware of the cycles of life that sustain them every day.

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