

HOME & GARDEN

A child's garden reinforces life's lessons

By PAT LEUCHTMAN
Recorder Columnist

A number of years ago I was at a summer afternoon party and I was amazed to hear a woman's complaints about the busy-ness of her life.

After four years, she had recently given birth to her second child and she said that having two children meant that she had so many chores to do that there wasn't time to spend on the amenities of life — like a bowlful of flowers on the dinner table.

I didn't have a lot of sympathy. I had five pre-schoolers of my own at the time and I almost always had a jar of flowers on my table (usually dandelions or daisies). Not only do I think children are no impediment to that bowlful of flowers, but I think it's a good idea to get outside with the kids and help them grow those flowers that can then grace the dinner table. The flowers will be admired, but even more importantly, so will the child's competence.

BETWEEN THE ROWS

Since we've been in Heath, we've had a number of young children come through our garden, including my grandson Mike, and I get such a kick out of their amazement when they pull a real carrot out of the ground or their pleasure as they munch on the sugar snap peas. Nothing tastes as good to a child as a vegetable he has picked himself, unless it is a vegetable he has planted himself.

A number of plants are especially suitable for using with children because they grow quickly and because they are good to eat right out of the garden.

Radishes are the traditional child's crop because they germinate quickly and are ready for harvest in only a month. The red roots are also very attractive to the child, but don't be surprised if they don't like eating them very much. That sharp, hot flavor that is so delicious to an adult can be hard on a child's tender taste buds.

My grandson Mike loves sugar snap peas fresh off the vine and when he comes to visit, I always give him a tour of the garden so he can see what's happening, and munch his way along the pea rows. I don't have to worry about washing the



peas either because I use no poisons in the garden at all. There could not be a safer place for a child, and I find that a strong reason for using organic principles.

Mike also likes string beans fresh out of the garden. Cooking is totally unnecessary. Raw vegetables are very nutritious because the vitamins have not been cooked out of them and spilled down the drain with the cooking liquid. Since they are picked and eaten within minutes, the vitamins have not had a chance to deteriorate.

Snap beans and wax beans are easy to grow in wide rows. They germinate quickly for the impatient gardener, young or

old. Just for fun I'd like to grow purple-podded beans and watch Mike's face when they magically turn green as they are cooked.

The Vermont Bean Seed Co. suggests another project for child gardeners. The Scarlet Runner Bean needs supports to grow on. Those supports can be made in the shape of a teepee. Leave space for a door and plant the seeds all around the teepee. It won't take long for the vines, loaded with scarlet flowers to cover the supports, making a green and secret cave that will eventually have it's own snack supply.

Autumn is not complete without pumpkins and few things will so delight a child as his own personalized jack-o'-lantern. Pumpkins take a long time to ripen, but it's wonderful to watch how fast the pumpkins grow. To personalize a pumpkin, a child's name can be carefully carved in the skin of a young pumpkin and as the pumpkin grows, so will the name.

Besides growing a jack-o'-lantern, a child might like to grow a giant pumpkin like a Big Max. It could end up weighing more than twice as much as the gardener.

Sunflowers are another easily grown and giant crop that children enjoy. They can munch on the seeds themselves or share them with birds in a feeder.

And now we have worked our way around to flowers again. Six-year-olds do not live by bean alone. There is always the desire to bring Mamma a gift that will please her.

Marigolds are easy to grow, requiring no special care and yet they will reward the gardener with sunny blooms that look cheerful in the garden or in the house.

Zinnias are another favorite flower. They can be tall or short, miniature, giant or ruffled. I like them because they come in a whole paintbox assortment of colors. Plant your flowers where they will get lots of sun and you and your child will never lack for bright flowers to go on the dinner table.

It's just important to remember to take a child's own preferences when planning his garden. He isn't going to be eager to tend his garden if all he has planted are rutabagas — and he hates rutabagas.

In a garden a child can learn about life and death, about health and nutrition, about good food and the pleasures of working in the air and sun. As he comes to understand that something must be returned to the soil in return for its gifts, he also will come to understand that give and take is necessary in life, not only in the garden — a valuable lesson for anyone.

Timely Tips

By TINA M. SMITH
Extension Service

- Watch for European pine sawfly larva feeding on pine trees. The caterpillars are grayish-green, striped, and feed in clusters. One application of an appropriate insecticide should suffice.

- Do not use dishwashing detergent sprays on trees for gypsy moth control.

- Acid rain will affect garden soil acidity; according to Dr. Lyle Craker of the Department of Plant and Soil Sciences at the University of Massachusetts. The pH of soils will lower slightly. For Massachusetts soils it was recommended to test for pH every three years. Now it is a good idea to test every year. Researchers will be looking for small lesions on plant foliage from acid rain this summer.

- Snakes, small mammals and rodents are attracted to your yard by adequate shelter and food. Eliminate these things and they'll move elsewhere. Fencing may be an investment for rabbit protection, but it will last many years. Clearing your yard of hiding places for snakes may solve that problem. Securing all openings into your attic will keep out bats, squirrels and birds. Everyone would like an easy solution, such as a repellent or poison, but these are not always available or desirable.

- Mulch your garden when the soil warms up.
- Cabbage plants wilted? Cool wet weather is ideal for the development of cabbage maggots. Cabbage maggots are easy to detect by digging up a wilted plant along with its soil and examining its root system for small white maggots and few roots. Eggs are laid close to the root, therefore, direct spray applications at the base of the plant and the soil around it. Maggot damage can be prevented by placing tar paper or carpet squares around the base of each plant.

- Transplant daffodils and other spring flowering bulbs if needed.

- Move houseplants outdoors gradually. Do not place them in the direct sunlight.



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