

Gardening with Children Is a Joy for the Gardener and the Child
by Carolyn Meiers

In late May, my five year old grandson called to say, "Grandma, guess what! The sunflowers we planted are coming up!" Since my grandchildren live some distance away I try to always visit in the fall and spring so we can do some seasonal planting together. We plant bulbs in the fall and sunflowers in the spring. To plant seeds or bulbs below ground and then anticipate them 'popping up' is a real joy.

Going back even further, when my children were young, we planted a vegetable garden. Each one had their own row and could choose what they wanted to grow. My daughter chose strawberries planted from nursery starts and my son chose carrots planted from seeds. The strawberries thrived and produced lovely fruit that the dog harvested and ate! When the carrot tops surfaced we watched them grow. The green was nice but there was not much else going on. Since it was early fall before they were mature, my son's interest waned a bit. After checking the plants for maturity I suggested he pull one out of the ground. The look on his face was utter amazement! "It's a carrot!" he shouted. We washed them and ate most of the crop on the spot. What a great way to get kids to eat their vegetables!

The garden is a wonderful classroom that helps children learn about nature, and the ecosystems that support life. Beyond planting and harvesting, children learn patience as they wait for the fruit or flower. They learn responsibility by nurturing and caring for what they've planted. They learn about the seasons, and what to expect. Seeds planted WILL come to fruition and then eventually die. It is such a wonderful introduction to the beauty and miracle of life.

Gardening with children takes time and patience but the rewards are great. It's important to keep it simple and plan short sessions. Small children are eager to help. They can really get into serious sprinkling. Our neighbor boys were helping me a couple of years ago and though the windows got most of the water they thoroughly enjoyed their task. We all had a good time. Time out for running through the sprinkler works too. If you don't have your own children or grandchildren available invite a friend's or neighbor's child, and plant something! You will be glad you did and so will they!