

Children in the garden



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ENCOURAGING children to get involved in growing plants is rewarding. The key is to start with something easy and quick to grow.

Gardening know-how seems to have skipped a generation; I often get mercy calls from my friends: "Is it too late to plant potatoes?" No, it's not, I reply and quickly run through what's required for a bumper crop.

Last week I got a text asking "Is a pumpkin a vegetable or a fruit? The kids are arguing about it... help me please Rach before one of them seriously gets injured". Pumpkins are fruits, I replied.

Kids do enjoy growing plants and are interested in what happens in the garden. Encouraging your child to be involved helps develop a well-balanced child in a society that is fast becoming technology orientated.

As parents, you can help your child develop immensely as a person by encouraging them to take notice of what is around them. Growing plants is fun and easy - you don't even need green fingers.

Sowing a few seeds, transplanting them, watering, weeding around them, monitoring the plants' progress and becoming aware of their surroundings will add a lot to a child's life. They become inquisitive and start to notice the environment - leaves changing colour, bugs that appear, butterflies, holes in leaves that are the results of caterpillar damage.

Identifying the good garden insects and



Learning about the natural world: Maddie in the potato patch.

bugs adds another dimension. Garden friends such as ladybirds and bumble bees will soon become welcome visitors rather than something to squash.

Allocating children their own plot of garden will encourage healthy eating habits and ensure much-needed time away from the computer.

Flynn Bunter, 6, from Papanui, is an avid gardener. He even has his own gardening gloves and is hoping Father Christmas may get him a gardening book for his stocking.

When Flynn showed me around his veggie garden he was able to tell me all the names of the plants, even indicating which was the giant garlic as opposed to the normal (something I couldn't easily identify).

While showing me round he got peckish

and quietly snacked on snow peas picked straight from the vine.

Flynn also mentioned he gets paid 10 cents for every white butterfly he catches. Nice work, I say to his mother, Amanda, who has been encouraging him in the garden for the past two years.

Amanda says Flynn "often decides what vegetables we are having for dinner; he likes to go out and choose them himself. It's been a great way to get him eating his vegetables."

Pumpkins are an ideal crop for kids. Plant out in a sunny position once frosts have finished. As the pumpkins start to form, tattoo or carve a name or picture on the pumpkin skin. As the pumpkin grows, so will the size of the name or picture

Win a kid's garden kit



The Star has a kid's gardening starter kit to give away. The kit (valued at \$75) comprises:

- 1x Quash - natural slug and snail bait 400g
- 1x Vegetable Mix 40L
- 1x Haxnicks Vegetable Planter
- 1x Saturaid 2.5L
- 1 Kids activity book

To enter, email your answer to the following question: **What do you think is the best gardening gift for children for Christmas?** to rachel@garden-nz.co.nz by Tuesday, November 17. The best answer will win the prize and be printed in *The Star*.

carved on the pumpkin.

The more water and fertiliser the pumpkin gets, the bigger it grows, encouraging kids to look after their plants. Zucchini is a good alternative and will cope with being tattooed, too. Once the pumpkins or zucchinis are harvested the children can count the seeds and save for next year.

Findlay Babbage, 4, won the Great NZ Grow Off vegetable growing competition last year. Findlay captivated the judges with his keenness and his innovative pest control methods, like using a fly swat to deal to white butterflies.



Little green fingers at work: Flynn Bunter in his garden.

Findlay's passion inspired his pre-school to create its own garden.

Enter your child now for this year's competition at www.nzgrowoff.co.nz There are categories for every age, skill and confidence level - First Time Vegetable Gardener category is a popular one for children and is what Findlay won last year.

It doesn't matter what you get the kids to grow this spring, just make sure they get growing - a strawberry patch can be a tempting start!

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It's tomato time!

Yes, Show Weekend is traditionally tomato planting time - and we have a superb selection - 45 varieties. Plus tomato planting mix, planting bags, tomato food, stakes etc.
Tomatoes are the oranges of the veggie world - high Vit C, high antioxidants, and remember, guys, tomatoes are great for prostate health.

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