

"How does your garden grow?"

Spring is a wonderful time in Los Angeles. Everyone wants to be outside enjoying our perfect weather before it gets too hot. It's also a great time to share outside activities with your children. Teaching children how to grow a garden is a productive way to spend quality time and provides them with a lifelong appreciation for nature.

Growing a vegetable/fruit garden with your children can be an enriching and rewarding experience. It encourages them to be healthy eaters. If they can grow it, they are more likely to eat it. In addition, a garden needs constant attention which necessitates parents and children spending more outside time together. They can work as a team on their project and have fun, too. According to some studies on children who garden, the findings show that children consistently show improvement in their sleeping habits, stress levels and eyesight. Children also learn responsibility when caring for their plants. They learn when to water, where not to walk and when to pick the produce. In our instant, "I want it now" society, gardening teaches patience. We have to wait for nature to take its course. When starting a garden, allocate an area about 6 by 10 feet, if possible. If that's too much space, try one or two large terra cotta or wooden flower/vegetable containers (be sure to have good drainage). The easiest way to engage your children in growing foods is to start with some vegetables that are not likely to fail, and are good to eat. Snap peas, cherry tomatoes, carrots, strawberries and zucchini, are generally successful. Choose a sunny area that gets some afternoon shade. Use enriched soil; have good tools; small tools for small hands (put them in a safe place when not in use). Begin with a few seeds that will grow quickly. Give age appropriate tasks to your children and supervise in the beginning. This is a great way to learn about bugs. We need worms to enrich the soil and ladybugs to eat the little bugs, praying mantis, too.

Gardening has a calming effect on children. It can be magical and full of surprises. It's fun to just dig the soil, scatter seeds, and wait for results. Maybe even create something beautiful. It will give children fond memories of their childhood and a desire to pass it on.

At Woodcrest School gardening is part of the health curriculum. The children all experience our "Secret Garden" (a project implemented by our wonderful parents). We have twelve 6 by 4 feet plant containers. The vegetables and fruits that are blooming currently are: strawberries, zucchini, squash, basil, cabbage, lettuce, artichokes, edemame, sugar snap peas and eggplants. The students look forward to working in the garden, as well as eating the delicious variety of vegetables and fruits that it produces.