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*What are some specific ways you can integrate your homeschool studies with gardening? Here is a collection of advice from other homeschooling families who have done just that! Some wonderful ideas here... Read, glean and use what works for you!*

Try doing a plant unit study. The kids will enjoy learning about how seeds grow, different styles of garden, pollination etc. At the same time get the kids involved in the garden, they'll enjoy it. Get them to pick the flowers and plant them. Don't aim too big.

Get them to examine and learn about a particular plant, insect, tree etc in your garden and then draw it in a journal. Do this once or twice a week looking at something different each time.

Through doing this as the seasons change children will naturally begin to notice the change in leaf color, watch flowers form into a bud and then open, watch butterflies and bees visit flowers and see if they can see any pollen attached to the insect/over the flowers petals etc

I would suggest starting with things that grow quickly and give colorful veggies to eat. When the kids start seeing those little veggies they get so excited. We chose things that we wanted to use in the kitchen. Start small, or it gets to be too much work and becomes uninteresting for the children.

Don't make it complicated. Start small and let your children help with planning and doing. My garden last year was a little interesting looking because my daughter picked most of the plants, but she loved helping take care of it and watching "her" plants grow.

For younger kids, use faster growing seeds. (It helps to have a couple inside on the window sill to see the roots grow, too.) Also, growing plants from "seeds" from the market is fun, e.g. avocados or potatoes.

Teach about edible and nonedible. The analogy can be drawn about good and evil. Teach your child from the beginning your absolute authority about anything they even put NEAR their mouths, much less put in it. The hard and fast rule must always be to come to you, just as they must go to God to know what is good or harmful for them spiritually. A host of biology can be taught, of course. I do the 'tree of life' thing -- teach about the simplest plants, and move upward from there. Exotics can be grown in summer that correspond to different parts of the world. You could make a large water-proof map and hang it outside to show which parts of the world certain plants grow -- or where they are used for food or basic economy needs. Ample opportunity exists on the aesthetic side. You can teach color and design to even young children. They can learn basic cultural requirements of plants early -- what needs sun, shade, wet or dry....etc.

Work it in as part of the curriculum - maths for figuring out area, fertilizer, etc., PE for the work, etc. While gardening has never been an official part of the curriculum it's always been a part of our everyday life

Let the kids grow the vegetables they most love to eat. My kids help with the tomatoes, planting, weeding, watering, and canning. Eating is their favorite step of the process!

Plan together. Let each child have their own garden plot to do whatever they want with as long as they take care of it themselves. Do some experiments. What will grow and what won't and why. Which watering technique is better than others and why. Make it fun. Let them get dirty. Build a string bean tee pee. Grow sugar pumpkins for pie. Grow some pickles. Let them snack right from the vine, if its clean. Plant flowers for the hummers and the bees. Hang various bird feeders in the garden. Turn over rocks and look for bugs and salamanders and frogs and such. Keep a nature journal. And give thanks to God for all of His wonderful creations.

Gardening (weeding, watering) needs to be daily, so working it into the school schedule is helpful.

Just get out there and do it... we put up 2 raised beds (two 12 ft. 2x6s cut into 9 1/2' and 2 1/2 ft. put together in the corners with metal "L" brackets filled with good dirt) and planted the usual tomatoes, peppers, lettuce, onions, beans and several herbs. Use the garden for Nature Study, draw your plants from seed to fruit, use notebook for everyday observations, learn about whatever bugs make a home in your new garden (we had black caterpillars devour our 3 ft tall sunflower in just over a week and then vanish!)

Integrate the savings into your budget, and study this out. It helps to get the kids savings-oriented.

Keep it fun. First let them read books about gardening and magazines to give them an idea of what they want to grow and what to look for as they are growing. Have them help start the seeds indoors that nered an early start in February - they can watch them grow while their is still frozen ground outside. Give them their own row or two to take charge of that they can call their own or even a whole small garden plot. Use a ruler every day or so to see how much the plants have grown once they break ground, make a chart and keep a journal of what worked and didn't and discuss why they think it turned out so. If you can or dry the food items, they can help. The younger ones can wash the fruits and veggies and the older ones can help cut them up, and such. They like to help keep and eye on the time for the canning process.

Let your kids plan their own garden. Creating on paper their own layout. Perhaps build raised beds with wood as a carpentry project Have your kids start seeds out inside early to see the process from seed to fruit/flower. Journal pages of each stage

Boys who love to dig are great to prepare the soil!

Get tools and gloves in their own size.

Start your garden at a time when you are going to be studying botany or some other subject that will mesh nicely with gardening, so that you all stay motivated.

Make them responsible for adding the herbs to any dishes, one of our boys is the "saucier" (chef in charge of sauces etc) - he has become an expert on flavours and aromas, and is reading books about herbs, and is only 8 years old. Give them responsibility in the garden: - one can look after the courgettes (keep them weeded and watered); - one can look after the roses (weed around the bases and mulch), then pick a bouquet for the table; - another can be the bugbuster - although they all like to take turns doing this job!

If your kids have greener thumbs than you do, let them run with it.

Remember that younger kids have shorter attention spans for weeding etc.

Try it! We have had more "failures" than success stories. But each year it gets better. When the children got to pick the pumpkins they planted and then bake them, their excitement was wonderful.

Study your soil, sun, natural fertilizers, water, and how it effects your crop.

Keep it small at first. A large garden sounds great in spring, but by August when all the weeds are there and its hot and dry, you'll regret it.

Raise ladybugs, raise praying mantises, too. they are fairly easy to raise and then it is great for your garden to release them to control the pests

Allow each child to choose their own plants and seeds. Make compost (my kids love this). Allow them to get dirty!

A fun project is a Sunflower House using sunflowers in different heights and morning glories. Spend the time to dig your garden and plant then mulch so you can enjoy the plants without the weeding.

Let the child actually plant the seeds and water them. Sunflowers are great for the younger kids (with less patience) because they see results so quickly. They can also pick out plants at the store and plant theirs in a special place in the garden. My girls pick a new flower to plant each year (usually a perennial).

A gardening song is a favorite of ours: "Inch by inch, row by row, Gonna make this garden grow All it takes is a rake and a hoe And a piece of fertile ground, Inch by inch, row by row, Lord you bless these seeds I sow Lord you warm them from below Till the rain comes tumbling down." Both Peter Paul and Mary and John Denver have sung this on various albums. We tweaked the words a bit because the original lyrics were "someone bless these seeds I sow" didn't sit quite right with us. Also, get the kids to help by looking thru gardening magazines and have them pick out vegetables or fruits they would like to try.

I always teach my children that God put everything needed inside the seed for it to grow into a mature plant that produces fruit. Just like He put His Word inside of us and it contains everything we need to mature and produce the fruit of the Spirit.

Two fun ways to focus your gardening are to certify your yard/garden as a Backyard Wildlife Habitat (<http://www.nwf.org/backyard/>) or a Monarch Waystation (<http://www.monarchwatch.org/waystations/>).

Just do a little something if you don't usually garden. A small 16 sq' can actually grow a lot. A Good book is "The Square Foot Gardening Method."

Have fun gardening-your enthusiasm is contagious. Talk positively and praise God for His goodness for supplying/creating all the different types of vegetables etc. Gardening is fun.

Try to join a 4-H group that does a gardening project so they could even enter their produce in the fair . Kids over 2nd grade can earn money fro blue ribbon at the fair!! How motivating is that. Any small child can help -even a toddler.

Let them each have their own garden journal and record activity. Keep and review during future years.

Have the kids help plot out the garden. Figure out what plants are 'helpers' to others (eg marigolds and tomatoes). Have them decide what to plant, and what works in your zone. Give them their own tools to use while gardening

Just let the kids be a part. Let them try anything. Give them their own space to take care of.

Take field trips to Nursery's to show what kinds of plants and flowers are out there to grow and how they would look at home.

We have a VERY small city lot. Give your children even a small space or a small planter and let them plant it and tend it throughout the season.

Let them learn. What happens when they don't water, weed, what happens when they nurture, etc.

If you aren't a gardening expert or a greenthumb...that would be me...I am so far from a gardening expert it isn't funny...but, I do know kids. They love to watch the seeds. If you don't know anything about gardening, get a book at the library or online. START SIMPLE and SMALL don't try to plant an entire vegetable patch with a lot of expense the first time, you can always expand next year, like 6 feet by 6 feet...then up...just an example...or start with a potted garden on your deck. Tomatoes, beans, etc. that can grow in pots if you don't have a backyard. Sunflowers. They are so easy to grow, and really little kids find this easy.

Spend time outside playing, snacking, and enjoying your garden.

Make it a privilege- something fun that they are welcome to help with, rather than a chore that must be done. If they see you working and enjoying the garden, they will probably beg to help.

Get stuff from the Library or Local Extension Office. They are a wealth of great info and you can find many things to involve kids in gardening.

Don't try to make it perfect - just do it. There's quite a lot to learn even in the failures.

Give them credit at the table when you eat from 'their harvest.'

Make checking the garden part of your routine, and it will become second nature. Sometimes it's best not to teach, but to let the child learn by observing for themselves.

Scrap the formal science for a few weeks and make gardening your subject. Check out as many books as you can on the subject and just have them lying around the house for the kids to pick up and peruse. Some of our best garden ideas have come from the kids seeing something in a book they liked.

DO put time in your school day for gardening. And don't feel guilty if you have to skip math to do it. Gardening is a subject all of its own!!

Let them have at least ONE plant that is their's alone, so that they can crow about the progress of THEIR plant... make it fun, and interesting...and much anticipated

A worm bin incorporates composting, newspaper recycling, and natural soil improvements -- plus you can do it inside and use the fruits of your labor for container gardens -- ideal for us none country folks.

Keep it fun, small. Our best year was when the children went to the garden store and picked what they wanted to grow. I knew the strawberries wouldn't make it, but my child learned more about them through sheer determination.

There are plenty of gardening books for children with fun activities available at the library. You can study plant parts, photosynthesis, insects, farming or how food gets from the farm to your table, How water gets to your hose. Kids can write about their gardening experiences or keep journals with drawings, etc.

Use it as away for eye hand co-ordination, counting, gardening in shapes (square, circle, etc.) instead of rows. Same for Letters. Teaching with scripture from the Bible about Gods creation. Fruit of our Labor. God Giving increase! (growth)

Be sure to just let them have fun. Dig, pull & cut. I think it is important to not be so precise. If you want "perfect," then do it yourself or hire someone. It is great for kids, an adults, to just "play" and try new things in your garden. Also, it is a great time to talk - about school, feelings, problems, worldwide issues, etc...

For us, it is a science lab. The kids get to see the seeds they planted grow into productive plants that they eat from. We handle insects with natural means, so we have to explain that entire process to them. They love to catch snails too. We get to teach them how our garden becomes a habitat for other creatures. They watch as that habitat evolves. Even amending the soil is a part of the learning.

We discovered our County Fair last year. I found out the children can enter veggies, flowers, wood work projects, art projects and photographs. We entered some items and placed and even won small amounts of money. This year we are planning to enter even more items. It was fun and educational. Our County Fair even has a "school day" and they allow homeschool families to participate. You get in free and can ride the rides and view all the exhibits and it's less crowded because it's during the morning hours before they open to the public. We will prepare our items during the summer months and be ready in September to participate in the fair. It will be an extension and review of our studies during the school year because we have completed studies in plants, light, and will be doing an insect unit. Also, take pictures of the garden from planting day and throughout the season. My daughter has an album and she put all our gardening pictures in it and it is one of her favorite "books" to look at.

When they're older, they do most of this by themselves.. You adjust your assistance level based on the child's abilities...but my kids have always been more capable than I thought they would be...albeit more messy!

Work together on it. Plan it together and hoe it together and weed it together. That works better then taking turns.

Pots are fine for a first garden

Let the child pick what he/she wants to grow...steering them towards the faster growing plants. Flowers, carrots, mini tomatoes, blueberries, etc. Let them pick where they want the garden (I give my kids 3-4 choices; that way, it's in a good sunny spot, but they still have some control). Help them measure out grids, figure out how many seeds go in what amount of space, etc. I have them draw or cut out pictures of their plants, and paste onto a larger piece of cardboard. I actually use cut up cereal boxes for this...the picture they choose (perhaps with a bit of construction paper to fully cover the graphics) goes on the front and the kids put down the pertinent info on the back. Then we cover it with cold laminate, tucking either a popsicle stick or a paint stirrer into the laminate. (depends on how big the label is) They each get a calendar for their garden, again, their choice...they write down when they planted what, and count the days 'til germination, then days to true leaves, days to first flower, first fruit, etc. as well as if and how much it rained, or got really windy, and so on. All info is marked onto their calendars. My older boys liked coming up with secret codes to indicate variables! I also help them research organic means of pest control, and they choose what they want to use. Then we head to the garden center to pick up lady bugs, praying mantis and even earth worms from the bait shop! So, they've done counting, measuring, estimating, research, reading, writing, arts and crafts, learned a bit about weather and pests and how to mitigate both, as well as nutrition, some physical exercise and biology lessons.

Children can practice using a ruler to plant seeds in order to achieve the correct planting depth.

Parents can teach/encourage Godly character qualities such as patience, diligence, and responsibility – they directly relate to what you have to do when gardening!

Students keep a daily journal as seeds germinate in order to learn observation and biology. Photos can be added. Bible verses should be added :)

Always plant the garden by the moon look up the type of veg or what ever your planting and see when is the best time to plant them.

Have a worksheet that shows each stage, take lots of pictures too.

Wait for Spring or Summer to do Science that involves growing plants or vegetables.

Start small; square foot gardening is great don't call it school! try composting, experiments with plants, grow fun things like catnip for your cat, gourds, flowers for butterflies, cucumber in a jar, insect study, etc

Get a 4-H project booklet and turn it in for judging! Take photos!

DO THIS!!! Gardening teaches a level of patience and fulfillment that is like no other

Integrate it into various areas and make it an ongoing project. Allow the kids to learn about whatever "rabbit trails" interest them.

Just do it!! Don't procrastinate.

How about studying a country then growing herbs from it and making a theme night dinner (parsley and basil for your Rome study)?

Pick some plants that grow very quickly because kids get impatient if they don't see

progress

Start small so you don't get overwhelmed.

Grow food & talk about pioneers' dependence on crops.

Let the kids have their own plot

Be patient and let them really help and not just be slave labor. Allow their mistakes and teach them without being too critical.

