



Our Favorite Garden Activities

A Green Thumb Family Guide

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We surveyed over 300 families (homeschoolers, homesteaders, city folk and gardeners) and asked them to share their suggestions for successfully integrating gardening into homeschooling and making "growing thing" a part of their family life. This is a compilation of many of their best answers. This is real-life advice, and there are LOTS of great ideas and insights in these pages. Read, glean, and utilize what fits you best!

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An easy gardening project anyone can do is sprouts! Some seeds and screened jar are all you need to grow your own food in two or three of days! No weeding or digging either. And it is a great homeschool "science experiment"! We got a 1/2 gallon sized jar with double screened lid for \$5 at our local healthfood store. They had smaller ones as well. You can grow radish, broccoli, mung beans, lentils, alfalfa etc. My favorite is radish! You can put sprouts in pretty much everything - sandwiches, omelettes, salads, baked in bread, even just a sprout salad.

Planting and growing Strawberries and Raspberries, picking, eating, and freezing, and making jam and jelly as well as many different veggies.

We love gardening in barrels, & learning about worms and butterflies.

We made a small garden just for them last year and planted flowers they chose. This year they want to grow sunflowers and vegetables, so we are giving them a try. They also like watching the birds at the feeders, digging up worms and watching butterflies.

Letting the child having their "own" garden --- flower or vegetable -- decorating with seashells is a very good idea. Always stock up when you are at the beach. They don't 'go bad.'

This year we are going to try using newspaper and plain paper to start our seedlings. The 9 yr. old loves doing origami and he wants to make some "bowls" to make the "pot" to hold the soil. We've made one so far. Then we can just plant them in the garden once the seeds start and it warms up here.

My kids' favorite was growing watermelons... we also have a botanical garden in town that has a kids garden club and we participated for several seasons, we met once a week (on Sat). They give you the plants, teach about spacial orientation and how to plant the different plants/seeds, tell you what's going on if your plants aren't doing well, etc. They really enjoyed that and learned a lot.

Entering flower arrangements in the county fair. You do not have to be part of 4-H to do this. You can also enter other veggies or flowers too.

When we were planting things in the fall, we pretended the girls were pilgrims, and I was a Native American teaching them how to plant and fertilize things.

We "rescue" plants from home-improvement stores (look in the clearance section), bring them home, & try to make them live. We've had great success watching the plants return to their former glory - just like God does with the children He rescues. The plants were "throw-aways" b/c they didn't look so great, but we saw their potential. God does that with all of us too. And we talk about how we need to see other people through Jesus' eyes too. What a great life-skills lesson!

Starting our own seedlings inside (all over the house). Planting them outside and watching them grow. 2. Testing soil for alkalinity and acidity. 3. Canning and preserving our homegrown products. 4. Gathering seeds from our overripe bean plants, planting them in clear cups, placing them on the window sill and watching the roots grow. This year we even produced a few beans from these seedlings. 5. We are looking forward this year to starting our own composting and brewing our own compost tea.

My kids have enjoyed trying to grow their own favorite vegetable or flower. My son chose sunflowers and my daughter chose swiss chard!

My son has tried to grow carnivorous plants from seed (to no success yet). The really like to help me in the flower or vegetable garden doing whatever needs to be done. The very best though was going outside and "planting" a bunch of fish to see if it helps things grow like Squanto taught the pilgrims.

When the kids were little, we used to pay them a penny per yellow dandelion head (2 cents per complete "puff" - no seeds lost) to pick them out of the yard so we could cut down on the amount of the noxious weeds (according to dh) in the lawn... if you like a green lawn, no dandelions, it really helps. One kid once picked \$20.00 worth in one session -- I know, I counted each one in the grocery bag I gave him to collect them! :-)

We built 4 raised beds. We grow mostly tomatoes, but also green peppers and some beans.

Growing tomatoes on the deck (our only sunny spot); growing carnivorous plants indoors.

Sunflowers were fun because they grow so quickly... and they liked planting vegetables (carrots, melons, cucumbers, tomatoes) that they could harvest and eat.

Our kids love watching seeds sprout in clear cups stuffed with paper towels that are kept damp and moist. We start seeds indoors before planting them outside in the garden or flower beds later.

One enjoys vegetable gardening, and the other enjoys flower gardens. Both need to be on a fairly small scale, or they lose interest.

My 6 and 11yo likes to plant the seeds. My 14yo liked tilling with me. My 16yo girl helped while she enjoyed tanning. :) Everyone:Harvesting

I made an Alphabet Garden. I got a set of wooden letters, and painted them with bright colors. I then mounted the letters on aluminum stakes and set them into the ground. At the base of each letter, I put a plant starting with that letter.

Last year was our first garden and we started a notebook on what to do next year and the things that worked and the ones that didn't.

My son LOVES to dig with a shovel and use real tools.

We have done the Tomatosphere project, this will be our second year. It's an experiment done through a Canadian university. See <http://www.tomatosphere.org> for more info. They do it with both school groups and home schools throughout the US and Canada.

Starting seeds in small pots, watching them start (you know up close and tiny) then transplanting them and watching them soar! ESP... giant sunflowers...my son loves to watch a seed turn into a giant sunflower over 8 feet tall. IN FACT last week when the store brought in seed, soil and pots, he was the first to put HIS own money on to the purchase of seeds, pots, soil...and a lot of seeds...man, he is going to have us just so busy!! LOL... he is excited for spring...oh and SO AM I!

We have a worm bin also, so they especially like caring for the worms all year and see the benefit to the garden of having the compost and "worm tea".

Our favorite gardening activities have been: -growing a sunflower house out of giant 10 foot sunflowers - growing strawberries and tomatoes - catching lady bugs - picking and eating raw peas and carrots - watching for spring bulbs (they're just starting to poke through).

Sweet potato, lima beans in window pots. We live in military housing, so no real gardens allowed!

Making sunflower houses, bean teepees, worm composting

Believe it or not, their favorite thing to do is to bring any worms they find over to the dirt in my garden. I was able to explain to them how worms help us. They also LOVE growing sunflower seeds in little clear plastic cups, with the seed planted on the side of the dirt so we can see it grow before it pops up.

Growing a butterfly or a hummingbird garden

Each of our flower beds are "owned" by each child. It is their garden. Each year we plant new perennials, according to the light requirements, and the weed and take care of "their" garden.

Our kids like planting seeds from foods they have eaten.

Filling 2 litre plastic bottles with coloured water for a flower bed border. Planting herbs and flowers, painting rocks.

We grow a butterfly garden each year. Just a few plants are needed. We use plants specific to each stage of the butterfly so we can see them go from caterpillar to chrysalis to butterfly.

"Mimicking" my big garden with "mini" gardens of their own in odd places...under the swing set slide, in the sandbox, in a terra cotta planter...

Starting flowers, tomatoes and herbs indoors. Zucchini indoors is amazing how fast it launches out of the container.

"Square Foot Gardening" works well for family gardening. Each child had their own little "plot" to plant. Trying different methods of composting was also fun.

We are doing a salsa garden - tomatoes, peppers, cilantro, green onions.

