

Generational Gardening

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Many of us enjoy gardening, and that enjoyment most likely came from either our parents, grandparents or some other adult. There are many social aspects of gardens and gardening. Gardening can be a place for couples to just talk or for parents to interact with their kids or for grandparents to interact with the grandkids. The time spent with others is what creates memories not necessarily the activity.

Some of the learning that takes place with kids can reinforce what is learned in school, whether it is math, or reading labels, and it encourages critical thinking and problem solving. The whole process of planning a garden, the location, deciding what to plant and ordering seeds or buying plants, along with the planting and care teaches lots of useful life skills to kids. This process is a learning adventure for both age levels.

Lots of kids today have very little concept of where their food actually comes from and what it looks like as a plant. The joy in the faces of kids getting to plant and grow something is very rewarding and builds lots of self-confidence. Over the years I have helped kids learn and enjoy planting and growing plants, whether it was in 4-H, county fair, and community gardens or with individual families. I have also found out that it does not take a huge effort. I once did a program at the Wyoming Girls School to plant some seedling trees. I took this for granted but found out the vast majority of those girls had never had their hands in soil before, and they were truly overjoyed and had such a positive experience with planting those seedling trees.

There are many opportunities in each community to involve adults with youth. This can first of all be parents or grandparents with kids, or Big Brothers; Big Sisters or other organizations, or even kids adopting a senior citizen to help them out with a gardening plot. We are seeing a nationwide effort to have garden plots at schools. This provides not only fresh produce for the school lunches, but it offers parents to be involved with the teachers and staff also. Wyoming has a "Farm to School" program to help encourage these relationships.

When organizing a garden plot keep it simple and fairly small to begin with, you do not want to overwhelm the kids or yourself, particularly later on in the growing year. Find foods that the kids like to eat first and then add some other varieties. It is also a fun activity to add flowers to a plot such as geraniums with tomatoes. Sunflowers would be another fun plant with maybe some climbing beans going up it. The whole process of planting and caring for the garden area on a daily basis builds appreciation for growing your own food, even on a small scale.

One of the things I still enjoy is the discussion with other gardeners young and older of the different ways to garden and to trouble shoot issues. There are lots of ways of controlling insects, diseases, and weeds and the variation is quit fascinating. The other part I enjoy is trouble shooting issues or identifying what is going wrong with plants and that is where having others involved will create solutions. Gardening is one of those lifelong passions every age can enjoy.

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