

Plant a KIDS' GARDEN

IT'S GETTING WARMER AND THE KIDS HAVE A ONE-WEEK HOLIDAY. IT'S THE PERFECT TIME TO SOW FLOWERS!

Grab a few seed packets and help your children start their own garden. Annual flowers are ideal for kids: they'll have all the fun of planting seeds, watching new shoots emerge and seeing them bloom over a few months. (And what child doesn't love playing with dirt and water?) Choose quick-to-grow seeds that are easy to care for, and let your kids loose in a patch of garden for plenty of outside play and a natural learning experience.

✓ PICK YOUR PATCH

Choose a garden bed (or window box) that you're happy to let the kids make their own. Start them off pulling out any weeds, mixing in some compost and then raking the bed level. Make it easy for them to reach the back of the bed by creating one or two stepping stones out of old bricks or paving slabs.

✓ MAKE LABELS

Create fun labels for each seed variety before you plant the seeds. Treat this as a craft activity and get creative. Any water-resistant item that can be painted will work: decorate ice-lolly sticks or wooden clothes pegs, recycle old wooden spoons, paint river stones, or just cut a plastic milk container into strips and write on them with a permanent marker.

✓ SOW THE SEEDS

Read the packet instructions with

your children, then let them decide how to distribute their seeds. Older kids might plant in geometric patterns, whereas little ones will probably go for the random cottage-garden effect - it's all good! Stick a label in next to each variety as soon as the seeds are scattered. Water well but not too forcefully. A small watering can with a rose spout gives a gentle flow of water that leaves the seeds undisturbed.

✓ KEEP THEM HYDRATED

The seeds should be kept moist until they have germinated, so encourage your children to water them every day until they see the first green shoots emerge. Then water as needed, according to the weather - daily in hot weather; less often in cooler weather. A child-sized watering can makes the chore fun. Make your own by punching lots of small holes in the lid of a plastic milk bottle.

FIND THE RIGHT FLOWERS

Quick-germinating flowers are best, as the kids will start seeing results in a couple of weeks: try nasturtiums, alyssum, marigolds and cosmos. Sunflowers take longer to sprout, but there's all the excitement of a flower that can grow taller than you, and the fun of staging 'tallest sunflower' competitions!

SEED TIPS

Big seeds like nasturtiums and sunflowers are easiest for little fingers to plant. Mix tiny seeds with sand or dry soil to make it easier for small children to sow them evenly, a pinch at a time.



SEEDS TO FEED YOUR FAMILY

While flowers are always a joy, some kids get more thrills from growing their own food. Fast-growing crops such as radishes and rocket are great for children wanting quick results. Cherry tomatoes, mealies and gem squash take longer to reach harvest stage but are very rewarding - and they are home-grown veg your kids might actually eat! ■

Good Buys



• **BUY IT!**
We love this affordable set of kids' gardening tools (R35) and small watering can (R85) from Starke Ayres.

• **PLANT IT!**
Look out for the Starke Ayres Seeds of Success collection (R14,50 per packet), which includes alyssum, marigolds and popcorn maize.

• **READ IT!**
Gardening Is Fun by Lynn Hurry and Keith Kirsten (R59, www.briza.co.za) offers practical tips on growing plants.

