

4 Easy Steps to Herb Gardening with Kids

by Kristine Brown



Summertime is here and it's the perfect time to get kids out of the house and into the garden! School is out, days are lazy and the heat and rain of summer do wonders for growing herbs.

Why Grow Herbs with Kids? Children learn best through their everyday experiences with the people they love and trust, and when the learning is fun. And the best place for these experiences is outdoors, in the natural world. – *Center for Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning*

Communities, Schools and Children's Learning

Kids love to feel empowered. Giving them a chance to grow the herbs they can use when they are sick gives them ownership and pride. They will be more willing to use them if they've had a hand in growing, harvesting and making remedies from the herbs.

Here are four easy steps to herb gardening with kids.

1. How to Get Started

Sit down and brainstorm what health issues your family deals with. Sore throats, coughs, allergies, cuts, scrapes ... these are all common household complaints that can be soothed with herbal remedies.

After you've made the list, think about herbs that would be good to grow in your backyard or in containers. Common kitchen herbs are a great starting point – they are familiar, they taste good and they work on a variety of health issues. Some great herbs under this category would be:

- Sage (*Salvia officinalis*)
- Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*)
- Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*)
- Basil (*Ocimum basilicum*)
- Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*)

Take into consideration how much space you have available, too. Herbs are great plants to grow in pots, so if all you have space for is a container garden, these herbs would be a great choice!

2. Keep It Simple

If this is your first time herb gardening with kids, stick to things that are easy to grow. In addition to the kitchen herbs, many other herbs are easy to grow and care for. Consider some (or all) of the following:

- Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*)
- Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*)
- Comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*)
- Chamomile (*Matricaria recutita*)
- Lemon Balm (*Melissa officinalis*)
- Peppermint (*Mentha x piperita*)

Many of these plants can be found at local nurseries, farmer's markets and roadside stands. Some, such as calendula and chamomile, are quick and easy to grow from seed. Many mint plants such as lemon balm and peppermint will easily root from a cutting – simply stick the cutting in a glass of water and put it in a sunny windowsill. Within a few weeks, you should see roots. (See our article on how to grow herbs from cuttings.) Comfrey starts easily from a small chunk of root; in fact, once you plant it, you'll have it for life so this plant is a good candidate to pot up.

Try to avoid hybrids of these plants as they often are not as potent as their original namesakes. Red and yellow yarrows are pretty but they are not as strong as the white yarrow. Often hybrids are bred for a certain characteristic such as color or leaf variegation which often may neglect the medicinal side of the plant.

3. Embrace Your Child's Interests with a Theme

Not sure if your child will enjoy growing a garden? Try incorporating a theme into it! What are your child's likes and interests?

Do they like cars? I recently saw a picture of an old Tonka truck that someone had filled with soil and planted. A few garage sales could yield quite a bit of old Barbie cars and Tonka trucks for planting purposes. How cute would it be to line a patio with various vehicles filled with plants!

How about fairies? Why not incorporate the magic of the Herb Fairies series by creating a fairy garden? There are lots of fun miniature fairy accessories available in many stores this year. Or, add some other fun features such as a few garden gnomes or gazing balls.

Do they like cats? Be sure to add some catnip to your garden! This is a great opportunity to learn how a plant can be useful for both pets and humans.

Another great theme is a rainbow garden, forming a garden in a U shape with rows of color.

If butterflies are a passion, why not create a butterfly garden? These plants make great butterfly (and bee) plants:

- Echinacea (*Echinacea purpurea*, *E. angustifolia*)

- Vitex (Vitex agnus-castus)
- Bee Balm (Mondarda fistulosa, M. didyma)
- Calendula (Calendula officinalis)
- Lavender (Lavandula angustifolia)

4. Now What?!

Once the garden has been planted, be sure to keep an eye for the optimum harvest time. Make a weekly or bi-weekly ritual of walking the garden with your child to check on the plants, nibble on their leaves and flowers and observe their growth patterns.

Watering and weeding time is the perfect time to do this. This will also give your child a connection to their plants and help them to foster a relationship with the plants. Older kids may wish to do this on their own or with you in tow.

If they are inclined, they can keep a plant journal with notes, drawings, rubbings and thoughts on their plants as they grow.

As a final reminder, keep it fun when herb gardening with kids. Be sure to harvest and use the plants throughout the season. And don't forget to use them in teas, oils, tinctures and vinegars.

About the Author - Kristine Brown Kristine Brown Kristine Brown, RH (AHG) is a practicing herbalist and mother of 4 children, 2 of which are homeschooled. In addition to seeing clients she writes and illustrates the award winning digital publication for children, Herbal Roots Zine, teaches classes on herbalism to adults and children locally and at nationwide herbal conferences, and has a handmade herbal goat milk soap line that she sells online, at stores in her area and at festivals. You can find her at HerbalRootsZine.com and LunaHerbCo.com.

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