

Gardening Can Be Child's Play

By N. T. Warren

My grandchild is four and she likes to “make plants”. By this she means transplanting purchased container grown plants to their summer homes in either a container among plants with similar growing needs or into the ground. This is a favorite activity at Nana’s and Granddad’s house.

She has her own gloves - pink of course - and she has learned that first we place recycled coffee filters over the drainage holes. Then we mix compost with potting soil and that mix goes into the container.

She knows how to gently squeeze the plastic, and turn the pot upside down to remove the young plant. She doesn’t think that she needs help with this but because her hands are small, Nana helps anyway.

Then we get to the best part – digging in the dirt and watering the plants in to remove air pockets from around the roots and to moisten the soil. We water with a gentle spray until the entire surface is covered and water runs out the bottom. We wait thirty minutes and repeat the process twice. Lastly, we remove our gloves and feel the soil to make sure it is evenly moist. By this time she is ready for some other activity, but each time she returns for a visit she must see how much “her plants” have grown-especially the tomatoes and sweet peppers that she loves to pick and eat before we get in the house.

Not only is playing in the dirt together a joy for multi-generations, but kids gain confidence as they learn about science and nutrition or basic skills. For example, we count slowly to twenty so we don’t over water the big pot. If plants are labeled, a child may learn to read the names on the label. They learn to cope with Mother Nature who can sometimes destroy their hard work with a hail storm or sudden late freeze as that not much can be done about grasshoppers.

There are as many ways to garden with children as there are families. Plan a circular pizza garden with wedges of tomatoes, onions, pepper, garlic and oregano. A giant sunflower teepee is exciting for kids. The seeds can be eaten by humans or left for the birds. Bird and butterfly gardens are enjoyable for everyone.

If landscape color is more to your liking, select an EarthKind rose variety and let it be the child’s rose. These are very successful, low maintenance plants that do not require poisonous sprays if planted in a sunny well- drained location that gets good air circulation. The soil should first be amended with three to six inches of compost. More complete information can be found on the EarthKind web site.

Whatever you and your child choose, there are plants that are easy to grow in this area. The Texas Agrilife Extension office 716-8610 has lists of many planting possibilities and Wichita Master Gardeners can advise you on your specific location.

Please join the Wichita County Master Gardeners on Wednesday May 18, from 10-12 at the Forum for our monthly gardening program. This month’s topic is “Invasive Plant Species”, led by Master Gardener Anne Dohrer. The cost is \$5.00 and benefits Master Gardener programs throughout the community.

Please email your garden questions to wichitamg@gmail.com and visit our website, www.overthegardengate.org. Now get out and garden.