

Engaging children in herb gardening

What's not to like?

Gardening is fun. Creating a child-centered area in your garden offers the opportunity for parents and grandparents to share knowledge with young family members while having fun digging in the soil. The reward of helping plants grow and then using them to prepare a favorite food will impact a child's life long after the garden has been put to rest.

General guidance for a child-centered garden project

- Select a fairly small area that receives at least 6 hours of sunlight per day. An area about 2 to 3 feet wide and 6 feet long allows a child to reach into the garden to water, weed and harvest without stepping into the soil or onto the plants.
- Select transplants and quick-growing seeds to provide swift reinforcement for the child's efforts.
- Let the child help with as many planting and care tasks as they are able. Talk with them about what is being done and why. Do not worry about neat, even rows or splashes of water and soil. Gardening is messy. Gardening is fun.
- Have your child make a sign identifying this special area as (child's name)'s garden. Staple or tape the sign to a slat of wood and place in the garden.

Creating a pizza garden

Pizza gardens usually have a combination of herbs and vegetables such as a tomato and onion plants and basil, oregano and parsley herbs. If you want to have fun with the space, you can create your pizza garden with a round shape and divide it into sections like slices of pizza.

Planting dates for pizza garden:

Onions: Feb. 10 – March 5

Parsley: Feb. 10 – March 5

Oregano: March 25 – April 15

Tomato (Roma): March 25 – April 15

Basil: April 15 – May 1

Sweet pepper (optional): March 25 – April 15

Spinach for topping (optional): Feb. 10 – March 10

Plant care:

Using a raised bed provides warmer soil and ensures good drainage. Add mulch to keep down weeds and moderate soil temperatures. Add water when soil is dry at a 1-inch depth. Remove weeds to keep them from stealing water and nutrients. Monitor plants for pests and disease and treat as needed.



Resources:

Texas EARTH-KIND™ Gardening Guidelines

(<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/plantanswers/earthkind/ekgarden.pdf>)

Integrated Pest Management for the Home Vegetable Gardener

<http://vegetableipm.tamu.edu/>

Pizza Sauce

4-6 tomatoes skin removed
1 small sweet onion finely minced
1 clove garlic finely minced
4 minced basil leaves
1 ½ tsp. oregano leaves
2 tbsp. olive oil
A pinch of salt, pepper and sugar

In a blender or food processor, puree the tomatoes. Sauté onions and garlic in olive oil until the onions are translucent. Add tomatoes, salt, sugar and pepper. Simmer for 20 to 30 minutes to reduce water content. When the sauce has reduced to the desired thickness, add basil and oregano. Continue to simmer for 1 to 2 minutes then remove from heat. If not using immediately, cool and place in the refrigerator in an air-tight container for up to 3 to 4 days.

Makes 8 servings.

Calories 51; Total Fat 4 g; Cholesterol 0 mg; Sodium 49 mg; Carbohydrate 5 g; Dietary Fiber 1g; Protein 1 g

3 ways to peel a tomato

1. Holding tomato with a fork, place in boiling water for 1 minute. Dip into ice water. Skin will remove easily.
2. Place whole tomato on a roasting pan and broil until skin blackens. Cool and peel.
3. Wash tomato and cut away the stem scar and surrounding area. Place on a cookie sheet and freeze. Remove from freezer and rinse under cool water. Skin peels off easily.

Putting your pizza together

1 whole-wheat pizza crust
1 cup of pizza sauce
1 cup of shredded skimmed-milk mozzarella
Selected toppings such as spinach, mushrooms, chopped basil, onions, diced chicken, chopped bell pepper, chopped tomatoes, Canadian bacon

Preheat oven to temperature recommended for the pizza crust. Spread pizza sauce on the crust. Add desired toppings. Sprinkle mozzarella over toppings. Place in a hot oven using a pizza stone or an oven rack covered with aluminum foil. Bake for recommended time (until crust is golden brown). Slice and serve.

Pesto

2 cups fresh basil leaves
2 large cloves of garlic
½ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
2 tbsp. freshly grated Pecorino Romano cheese
¼ cup pine nuts or walnuts
½ cup olive oil
salt and pepper to taste

Combine basil, garlic, cheeses and nuts in food processor or blender and process to mix. With machine running, slowly add olive oil. Season with salt and pepper. Let stand 5 minutes before serving over pasta or vegetables.

Makes 8 servings.

Calories 216; Total Fat 22 g; Cholesterol 9 mg; Sodium 174 mg; Carbohydrate 2 g; Dietary Fiber 0g; Protein 5 g