

PHOTO: JAMIE COLE



Grow a Gardener

Part Two: 10 activities to get the video-game generation playing in the dirt and enjoying gardening.

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For more ideas on how to get kids gardening and for proof that such activities help you raise healthy sprouts, see go.myFarmLife.com/gardenkids. You'll also find Part One of the "Grow a Gardener" series, along with sources for seed starting.

IN OUR WINTER 2011 ISSUE, we shared ideas for getting children interested in gardening with tips on garden design and starting seeds. In this issue, we offer activities that will help those budding gardeners bloom outright.

Gardener Karen Creel, who blogs as The Garden Chick from her home in Chickamauga, Ga., grows herbs, vegetables and flowers with granddaughters Mackenzie, 8, and Kendall, 6. Creel has taught them to garden with fun, age-appropriate activities and often follows *their* lead.

"We let them pick out what to plant," Creel says. "One year they just threw in flower seeds, so we had cut flowers."

To get children to plant fruits and veggies and then eat them, she also recommends a variety of fun activities that allow kids, big and little, to take charge and provide some or all of the care and direction themselves.

"Gardening is like letting kids have a pet," Creel says. **"They learn it's their responsibility, to help it grow. And they learn patience, because you don't plant something and see it come up the next day."**

Garden produce will seem all the more appetizing, contends Creel, if you create something like a pizza garden. "Plant onions, tomatoes and peppers, and make [your garden] round, like a pizza. You can section it off, with tomatoes in one slice, basil and oregano in another, and so on."

To further the connection to the garden and its potential, Creel talks with her grandchildren about how they can aid those in need. "We gave money to send seeds to farmers," she says. "We talked about how a pound of seed multiplies, and the family that gets the seed can save it when they harvest their crop, and keep on giving when they share the seeds with another family."

To encourage your kids to grow an interest in gardening, try some of our easy, fun projects.

For younger children:

- Have a contest to grow the first tomato or the biggest pumpkin. Give everyone a small prize.
- Start a compost pile. Let the kids add worms and kitchen scraps.
- Plant a butterfly garden and watch for caterpillars, cocoons and butterflies.
- Fill kid-sized watering cans from a rain barrel, and let the little ones water plants.
- Nail two narrow boards together, and let the kids help you dress it as a scarecrow. Preschoolers will also enjoy hearing you read *The Little Old Lady Who Was Not Afraid of Anything*, a story about a scarecrow that's not so scary, after all.

For older kids:

- Let them sell what they grow, under your supervision and with any necessary permits, and keep their earnings.
- Let them donate their produce to a food pantry or nursing home.
- Help them start a garden blog.
- Talk about gardening as a way to prepare for a career in agriculture, arboriculture or landscape design.
- Encourage your kids to help others through programs like Plant a Row for the Hungry. **FL**