



GARDENING

Patrice Powers-Barker, MA, CFLE

An edible garden offers the opportunity to explore, learn, grow and eat. Although it might be called a “vegetable” garden, fruits, flowers and herbs all complement the growing space as well as the mealtime menu. A garden can be as simple as a few vegetables or herbs growing in containers. It can be as elaborate as a large area in the yard complete with play spaces defined by a sunflower house and a bean-pole tepee.

A garden space introduces young children to science concepts such as nature, shapes and the five senses. From a nutritional perspective, an edible garden of vegetables, fruits and herbs offers the opportunity to learn about new





“An edible garden of vegetables, fruits and herbs offers the opportunity to learn about new foods, food growth, and various food tastes.”

foods, food growth, and various food tastes. Gardens can also increase the variety of healthy food available to the family. In addition to introducing young children to fresh produce, the garden can offer an opportunity for family members of all ages to try or retry new foods.

One advantage of family gardening is the opportunity to grow a colorful variety of plants. Grow white radishes, purple peppers and striped tomatoes. Grow different sizes of vegetables like cherry tomatoes, Roma tomatoes and large slicing tomatoes. Eat different parts

of the plant like the beet root or turnip root as well as the leaves (beet greens or turnip greens.) Enjoy growing and using fresh herbs such as mint, rosemary and chives. Chive leaves taste like mild onions and the purple chive flowers can be added to a salad.

Many children’s books about vegetables, fruits and flowers can offer themes and ideas for the family garden. A few examples include: *Growing Colors* by Bruce McMillan, *Eating the Alphabet, Fruits and Vegetables from A to Z* by Lois Ehlert, *The Maybe Garden* by Kimberly

Burke-Weiner and *Sunflower House* by Eve Bunting.

Gardens can be used to grow the ingredients for a favorite family recipe. Some common “recipe gardens” are salsa gardens with tomatoes, peppers, onions, tomatillos and cilantro; pizza gardens with tomatoes, basil and banana peppers; salad gardens with lettuce, spinach and fresh herbs; or pesto gardens with basil, other greens and garlic.

Family gardens are a learning space to grow tasty, colorful foods for the whole family.

Smart Eating for Young Children

This article on gardening is one chapter of the Smart Eating for Young Children booklet that covers topics ranging from breastfeeding and portion sizes to food safety and food insecurity.

Good nutrition and a balanced diet in early childhood help kids grow up healthy and have the potential to positively impact lifelong eating behaviors and overall health. Smart Eating for Young Children is a 26-page booklet that provides professionals and families with practical information and advice to support healthy eating habits in children from birth to 5 years old.

This booklet is available for purchase as a hard copy or as a pdf at extensionpubs.osu.edu/smart-eating-for-young-children/

For questions on gardening with children, please contact Patrice Powers-Barker at powers-barker.1@osu.edu