

how to garden with children

Gardening skills and knowledge are something we can pass on to future generations. A garden is a living classroom where children learn important skills to nurture tiny seeds or plants into flourishing flowers, or fruit or vegetables they can eat. It gives them the opportunity to get outside, enjoy family time together exploring the outdoors and creatures around them.

Top tips for gardening with children

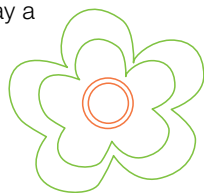
- 1 Be in the garden together.
- 2 Remember children are exposed to the same things as you while in the garden but take a different experience from it.
- 3 Be a part of their experience and be guided by them – pay attention to what they are discovering in the garden and see what attracts their attention eg watering, bugs, digging etc!
- 4 Create an area in the garden that children can design and define themselves. Let them plant whatever they want in their space – even if it's not 'right'.
- 5 Give children their own set of tools and talk to them about garden safety and maintenance such as wearing gloves, and cleaning and putting tools away afterwards.

Plants your little gardener can grow

Visit your local gardening centre and have fun exploring and choosing your plant seeds or seedlings together. Here are some child friendly varieties:

Flowers

Children love flowers with bright colours and gorgeous scents. Talk to them about different types of flowers they can plant in the garden, such as nectar producing varieties to attract beneficial insects like bees and other pollinators that play a major part in a garden's ecosystem.



Flower varieties to try:
Sunflowers, Cosmos,
Zinnias, Marigolds,
swan plants, any
bulbs eg Daffodils,
Freesias etc.

Fruit and Vegetables

Gardening and healthy eating go hand in hand – when children help in the garden they are exposed to different vegetables and fruits and experience many tastes and flavours. Grow grazing vegetables and fruit that can be eaten raw right from the plant.

Sprouts are simple to grow and there are many seed selections to choose from. Sow seeds into containers like egg containers, or directly in the garden.

Purple beans, green beans, scarlet runners, long beans, dwarf beans – children will love the colours and sizes of the different varieties available. Discuss why some beans need support structures to climb up, and let them help you secure the plant as it grows.

You can even make a 'bean tepee' which is a great summer hidey spot for children. Construct a large tepee (from bamboo or stakes) and leave an opening in the front so children can enter. Plant green or runner beans around the outside to grow up the structure.



Peas are an easy crop for children to grow. Choose from climbing or dwarf varieties, or try tasty snow or sugar snap peas which can be eaten pods and all.

There are many different salad greens that are simple and quick to grow. Try mesclun mix, spinach, rocket or kale. Show children how to remove just the outer leaves of buttercrunch, oak leaf or cos lettuce to eat, so the plant keeps growing. Regularly sow seeds or plant seedlings to ensure continuous supply.

Children can sow carrots and radishes directly into the garden and will have lots of fun pulling them up come harvest time.

Cherry tomato varieties such as Tom Thumb or Sweet 100 are ideal for kids. Grow them in **Daltons Garden Time™ Tomato Mix** for sweet juicy fruit that makes a delicious snack or lunchbox treat.

Strawberries are the number one fruit for kids to grow in the garden – and they are so good for them! Plant into **Daltons Garden Time™ Strawberry Mix** for best results.



Digging up potatoes together can become a family tradition. Plant them once the soil warms up, eg late October early November (depending on where you live in NZ) for potatoes in time for Christmas.

Garden jobs for children

Spending time in the garden together creates wonderful memories for your children, with the bonus of learning useful skills along the way.

- 1 Let children help you prepare your garden beds so they learn why you prepare the soil before you plant. Talk about how mixing in compost and soil mixes like **Daltons Enriched Compost**,

Daltons Premium Flower Bed Mix or **Daltons Garden Time™ Vegetable Mix** adds nutrients to help plants grow. Give them a spade and their own spot to dig in.



- 2 Children love watching the fascinating process of germination from a tiny seed to a thriving plant. Discuss why we sow certain seeds at different times of the year, and why you need special seed raising soil that has everything the seed needs to germinate.

To sow seeds indoors, fill your container with **Daltons Premium Seed Raising Mix**. Make sure the soil is damp but not too wet. As a rule of thumb, plant the seed as deep as the size of the seed, so a 1cm size seed should be planted 1cm deep. If you are planting tiny seeds such as lettuce or carrots, just sprinkle the seeds in a line and cover lightly with seed raising mix then water gently. Seeds only need warmth and water to grow. If you are sowing seeds directly into your garden, explain to your children why you grow some seeds in different places, for instance; because certain plants grow taller than others or need more space etc.



- 3 Get children to help you add a layer of **Daltons Mulch & Grow** around plants. Give them a little rake to help and talk them through how mulching is an important part of protecting the soil and plants from the elements.



- 4 Watering is a regular task that children enjoy and each day they can see their plants development. Teach them about watering throughout the seasons; much more frequently in the hotter months as plants are thirstier and soil dries out quicker, and less in the winter due to more rainfall. Get them a watering can to use which helps conserve water and regulates how much is applied.

- 5 Weeding, not the most fun task for little or big gardeners, but essential for a healthy disease free garden. It's a task best suited to those that are old enough to learn the difference between the plants we want to keep and the plants we want removed! Discuss how it's an important job to ensure our 'good' plants are not competing with weeds for nutrients or root space.

- 6 A perfect way to teach children about sustainable living is to get them involved in composting, whether it's collecting and taking the kitchen scraps out or collecting garden litter such as leaves, weeds etc and putting them into the worm farm or compost bin. As the compost breaks down, let little gardeners help you turn the compost (age dependent) as they can learn a lot about what lives in the compost eg worms, bugs etc.

- 7 Picking peas, beans and tomatoes is a great job for little hands. When it comes to collecting fruit like berries or strawberries, you may need to monitor your little helpers to ensure some fruit ends up in the bowl! Shelling peas together is also a great way to spend time together talking about adventures in the garden!



- 8 After a snail or slug attack on their plants, children can become your greatest ally in the garden in the task of pest control. Monitor your garden together regularly, looking for problems (children will learn important observation skills). Teach them to look carefully under the leaves and on stems of plants for pests, as many are camouflaged well. To deter slugs and snails let children sprinkle broken shells or bark around key plants that slugs and snails love, and that you want to protect. Tell them how snails don't like the 'scratchy' feeling of these things, which helps keep them away.



Growing in pots

If you have limited space then growing in pots is ideal for children. There are also plenty dwarf varieties of vegetables that grow successfully in pots. Always use a good quality container mix such as **Daltons Premium Potting Mix**, or **Premium Tub Mix** – these have moisture retaining qualities and deliver a well balanced slow release of nutrients. It's always a good idea to replace last season's worn-out soil with a fresh new soil mix.



Fertilising

Different categories of plants need different nutrients, and therefore require specific types of fertilisers. Feed flowers with **Daltons Premium Rose & Flower Fertiliser**, and vegetables with **Daltons Garden Time™ Vegetable Fertiliser**. For juicy berries and strawberries try **Daltons Garden Time™ Fruit & Berry Fertiliser** or **Strawberry Fertiliser**. Use **Daltons Garden Time™ Tomato Fertiliser** for bumper tomato crops. Apply side dressings of fertiliser throughout the growing period (depending on what you are growing) and water it in well. Fertiliser should always be applied by an adult.



Gardening terms explained

Replacement planting/or succession planting – Planting the same plant again as the previous one comes to an end.

Side dressing – Means to apply fertiliser to the soil on or around the sides of the plant.

Mulching – Add a top layer of organic matter such as wood chip or pea straw so the soil and plant are protected from the elements. Keeps moisture in during summer months, keeps soil warm during colder months.