



What Grows in Grandma's Garden?

by Marcia Goldstein, UC Master Gardener

Whether you have grandchildren, children or just your own sense of adventure there are many attention getting plants that will draw people into your garden and make it an exciting place to visit.

You will be doing children a big favor as well if you can attract them to the out of doors. According to Richard Louv in his best-selling book *Last Child in the Woods*, "Our children are the first generation to be raised without meaningful contact with the natural world." Citing the CDC (Centers for Disease Control) he says that, "The childhood link between outdoor activity and physical health is clear." We all know that for both physical health (including weight control) and mental health it is important to step away from the TV or computer and get outside.

What kind of plants will attract children? Plants that lived when dinosaurs walked the land; plants that are carnivorous; plants with really big flowers and fruits; plants that grow fast; and plants that stimulate the senses of smell and touch. Think about the kids who might come to your garden and what their interests are. If you have a budding paleontologist in your family you will want to include plants that have been around since dinosaur days. Here are some of them that can be grown in our area. Horsetails (*Equisetum hyemale*) grow in tall spikes and are a native California plant. They were an important source of nutrition for plant-eating dinosaurs. Cycads are a good choice for a tropical look. The one you may find, the Sago Palm (*Cyca revolute*), is not an actual palm but has a jungle-like, palm appearance. The many types of ferns can fill out your dinosaur garden setting and attract little boys with their plastic dinosaurs ready for play. Remember, though, that it was much wetter when dinosaurs lived so these plants need to receive regular water.



Dutchman's pipe
Aristolochia californica

One of my favorite plants and one of the rare carnivorous plants native to Tulare County is Dutchman's Pipe (*Aristolochia*). The odd pipe-shaped flower on this vine traps insects in its nectar and absorbs them. I have two growing successfully on my property in Three Rivers, and because it is on the endangered plant list I feel good to know I am adding to their population.

Let's talk BIG. Kids like large flowers like our native Matilija Poppy (*Romneya coulteri*). It can have flowers 12 inches across and is often called the Fried Egg Plant because of its white petals and yellow center. Don't forget sunflowers! There are many to choose from and the resultant seeds make excellent bird food. How about pumpkins and zucchini? They grow quickly and kids like hunting for them in the big leaves.

Some of the joys of being in a garden are the smells and feels of plants.



Lamb's ears - *Stachys byzantine*

Try planting furry Lambs Ears (*Stachys byzantine*). Their gray foliage makes a good ground cover or edging plant and you can show your little ones how to gently touch them.

Use your imagination in choosing plants with fragrances. Try Lavender (*Lavandula*), Sage (*Salvia*), our native Mock Orange (*Philadelphus*), or any of the fragrant herbs readily available.



Wild Mock Orange *Philadelphus lewisii*

Chocolate mint is my new favorite!

Make your garden fun and you and the children you know will like to be out in it. And don't forget, part of the fun is getting dirty and finding bugs and slugs. That is what Grandma's garden is all about.

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