



Photo courtesy of Miranda Luce

Peanut Butter and Jelly

**By Barbara Schuchart,
UCCE El Dorado County Master Gardener**

Children and gardening go together like peanut butter and jelly. Why, you might ask? There are many reasons. It's precious time that you and your child can spend together, and it can be so much fun. It helps children to develop a life-long hobby. It is a healthy activity, because everyone is outside getting exercise. Children learn patience and grow in self-esteem and confidence with each success they have in the garden. You also can share flowers and vegetables with friends, neighbors, and people in need.

How do you get children interested in gardening? Show them your love for gardening. Include them whenever you possibly can when you are working in the garden. Let the kids make their own garden, adding stepping stones with their names and some of their friends and relatives names. Let kids choose what to plant with your guidance and help. Make a sign with your child's name so everyone can see that it is their garden.

Relax your standards -- don't worry about color schemes and having everything just right. Grow plants in different kinds of containers such as an old boot, a hat, or a wheel barrow. Grow unusual plants, such as pink potatoes, orange cauliflower, or purple beans. Take photos for parents and grandparents, and decorate and design labels for their plants. The main thing is to have fun -- the pure fun of digging in the dirt is the real key to installing an interest in gardening for children. Kids love to have fun!

Safety is very important so don't leave young children unattended in the garden. Watch out for sharp objects, and teach them the correct way to use tools. Children should have their own set of tools appropriate for their age. Tools suited for their size include a trowel, gloves, a rake, a bucket, and even their own wheel barrow. Children's gardening tools are available on the internet, or in a hardware or gardening store. Have them wear the proper clothes so they will be safe from the hot summer sun. Always be watchful.

Some ideas that will help keep children interested and learning is to start a garden journal with their own pictures and drawings. They can decorate their journal and write about their special plants; have them also add ideas for future plants. Variety and extremes in plants is important: kids love huge plants such as sunflowers and Atlantic giant pumpkins, they also like small plants like cherry or grape tomatoes. Textured plants such as lamb's ear or fuzzy wooly thyme are fun, as are colorful plants and ones that have nice fragrance. Don't forget plants that attract butterflies and hummingbirds such as Bee Balm (Monarda), Sage (Salvia), Butterfly bush (Buddleja), Nasturtium (Tropaeolum), and Zinnias (Asteraceae). Also consider the old reliable flowers that bloom most of the summer: Geranium, Marigold (Tagetes) and Petunia (Solanaceae).

Remember to keep it simple and make everything age appropriate. Don't be afraid to let them get dirty and just dig in the dirt. Sometimes it's nice just to sit quietly with a big glass of lemonade and observe what is going on in their garden. Treasure the time you are spending with your child; the many enjoyable moments and lessons learned together. Gertrude Jekyll, a British garden designer, writer, and artist, said it best: "The love of gardening is a seed that once sown never dies." Plant that seed in your child's heart, and you will have a gardener forever.

Join Master Gardener Steve Savage at this Saturday's free public education class, Water Efficient Gardening. Summer is here and most of us have started irrigating our gardens and landscape plantings; learn when and how much water to give your plants. The three-hour class starts at 9:00 a.m. in the Veterans Memorial Building, 130 Placerville Dr, Placerville, CA.

Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions at local Farmers Markets, and also at our office Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon; call [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). Walk-ins are also welcome at the office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at http://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.