

## **Gardens Grow More than Flowers and Vegetables**

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Gardens provide us with an opportunity for discovery. Early in the season we clear away the debris from the previous year and lovingly transplant tender young seedlings. First, the frost hardy pansies giving us our first splash of color and later, as the season wears on, other flowers and the coveted tomatoes with visions of a big juicy beefsteak hanging off the vine. Later in the year our labors are rewarded with a full palette of colors and a bounty of fresh vegetables. Some would say that the only thing better than a ripe juicy tomato or a sweet carrot is sharing the garden experience with children. Sharing a garden with children gets them outside exploring, discovering and learning while helping to forge a connection to the sources of our food. Richard Louv, in his book *Last Child in the Woods*, makes a strong argument that outdoor play and activities, including gardening, are important factors in the development of a child.

There are many ways to include children in gardening. You don't need a huge garden, a small 3 by 5 foot plot with some flowers, lettuce, carrots, a tomato and some herbs can be plenty and will certainly inspire wonder at what can grow. Some fun garden projects to do with children include growing a pizza garden, which is shaped like a pizza with each "slice" growing tomatoes, onions, peppers, basil or other favorite pizza veggie. In the fall you can harvest your vegetables and make a great sauce for some homemade pizza. Or try a sunflower house. Plant a small circle, about 5 feet in diameter, with tall sunflowers around the perimeter with a small gap for a door and soft clover in the middle, as the season progresses the walls of a little garden hideaway will grow, creating a special place in the garden for your little ones to play in.

If you don't have space for a garden at home there are some community garden opportunities growing in the area. The MWV Green Team will be starting a community garden this spring on Tasker Hill Rd, contact Jen Andrews at (603)475-3587 for more information. The Green Mountain Conservation Group (GMCG) will be starting a community garden at their Huntress House office in Effingham and will be offering a Green Thumbs Gardening with Children program this summer in partnership with the UNH Cooperative Extension 4-H Youth Development Program, contact GMCG at 569-1859 or UNH Cooperative Extension for more information. If there are no community gardening opportunities in your immediate area, consider starting one of your own. UNH Cooperative Extension has the resources to help you start a 4-H gardening club with some friends. 4-H provides volunteer leaders with the resources to provide positive learning experiences for youth from 5-18 years of age in the areas of the Arts and Sciences, including gardening. For more information on gardening, community gardens, resources for gardening with children or 4-H programs contact the UNH Cooperative Extension at our office in Conway at 447-3834.

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