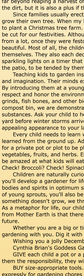

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Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian

Young sprouts!

By Cynthia Brian

After planting her seeds, the garden must be watered. Photos Cynthia Brian

"The lesson I have thoroughly learnt, and wish to pass on to others, is to know the enduring happiness that the love of a garden gives. I rejoice when I see anyone, and especially children, inquiring about flowers, and wanting gardens of their own, and carefully working in them. For love of gardening is a seed that once sown never dies, but always grows and grows to an enduring and ever-increasing source of happiness." ~ Gertrude Jekyll

Watching the wide-eyed wonder of children during the holidays is an additional dividend of the magical season of Christmas. The twinkling lights, the tantalizing aromas of cinnamon and nutmeg, the joyful caroling tunes, and most of all, red-nosed Rudolph prancing through the night sky leading his herd of reindeer to the chimneys of good little girls and boys.

December is a great month to spark children's enthusiasm for gardening. The rewards go far beyond reaping a harvest of fruits, flowers and vegetables. Not only do kids get to dig in the dirt, but it is also a plus if they get dirty.

Since families usually erect a Christmas tree or Hannukah Bush, it is fun to let each child grow their own tree. When my kids were young, we bought one-gallon pines, spruce, and firs to plant a Christmas tree farm. They watered, pruned, protected, and prepared the trees to be cut for our festivities. Although the trees never matched the symmetry of ones purchased from a lot, once they were festooned with all the homemade ornaments, they were uniquely beautiful. Most of all, the children were proud that they had grown this special tree all by themselves. They also each decorated a small growing Christmas tree for their bedrooms with sparkling lights on a timer that went off at bedtime. After the holidays, the tree went out to the patio, to be tended by them.

Teaching kids to garden instills responsibility, patience, love, creativity, tolerance, hope and imagination. Their minds expand and they learn a deep appreciation for living organisms. By introducing them at a young age to the natural world, we are showing them how to respect and honor the environment. When we scrape vegetable scraps, eggshells, coffee grinds, fish bones, and other biodegradable items into a pail that we add to our outdoor compost bin, we are demonstrating the value of enriching the soil with natural, nontoxic substances. Ask your child to help you shovel woodchips into a wheelbarrow to add to the yard before winter storms arrive to prevent erosion, keep the soil warm, and provide an appealing appearance to your landscape.

Every child needs to learn where their food comes from. Healthy eating habits are learned from the ground up. Add packets of seeds to a Christmas stocking with instructions for a private pot or plot to be planted in the spring. Stuff in a small field guide about growing vegetables, fruits, and herbs. Encourage dreaming of what crops to plant in the spring. You'll be amazed at what kids will eat when they put in the effort of growing it. Brussels sprouts? Check! Broccoli? Check! Spinach? Check!

Children are naturally curious and by keeping your nature talks short and fascinating, you'll develop a gardener for life. Gardening is fun and it's an excellent way to keep our bodies and spirits in optimum shape. While you are sowing the seeds of growing in the minds of young sprouts, you'll also be planting resilience and acceptance. Failure is fertilizer. When something doesn't grow, we throw it on the compost pile to grow a new garden next season. As a metaphor for life, our children are all going to flounder and fail. The teachable moment from Mother Earth is that there are no mistakes if we learn the lesson and fertilize for the future.

Whether you are a big or tiny sprout, my gift is to pass on my love and knowledge of gardening with you. Dig it with your kids!

Wishing you a jolly December of magic and marvel!

Cynthia Brian's Goddess Gardener Tips for Gardening with Kids

GIVE each child a pot or a plot of land to grow whatever they desire. When you give them the responsibility, they will rise to the task.

BUY size-appropriate tools. A hand trowel, rake, shovel, wheelbarrow, and bucket expressly for gardening chores gives a child a sense of accomplishment. Don't forget the garden gloves!

SUPPLY seeds that are easy to grow. Include vegetables such as carrots, radishes, beets and lettuces, and some pretty flowers like sunflowers, zinnias, marigolds and calendulas.

MAKE it fun by showing them how to use chopsticks to plant seeds.

BUY small two-to-four-inch containers of herbs for a windowsill garden. Dill, mint, sage, parsley, and oregano are simple to grow and can be snipped for pizza, spaghetti, and soups that put smiles on their faces.

GROW thornless succulents including ice plant, aloe vera, echeveria, and jade that require very little water or care.

PLANT theme gardens with your kids. Everyone loves butterflies and a Butterfly Garden will encourage kids to watch the evolution of nature from creeping caterpillar to graceful flyer. Include alyssum, butterfly bush, coreopsis, asters, salvias, Lamium, milkweed, penstemons, lavender, and snapdragons. Other ideas include a Pizza Garden with everything except the pepperoni and cheese, a sensory garden of plants with texture, taste, smell, sound and beauty. Or how about a 24-Hour Garden where each of the plants blooms at a different time? Use morning glories for the a.m., four o'clocks for the afternoon, evening primrose for early evening, and moonflowers for the night. If you have the room, one of my favorites is a Pie Orchard with peaches, apricots, cherries, pears, and a berry patch. Or two gardens my own kids loved were the Christmas Tree Farm which they planted leftover small pots of live trees, spruce, pine and fir, and the Halloween Cemetery of various types, colors, sizes, and textures of gourds and pumpkins.

SHARE plant and seed catalogs with your little sprouts. Let them select photos they find enticing and read to them the descriptions. Follow up with a socially-distanced, masked-wearing field trip to a nursery or garden center to investigate the various specimens.

ALLOW kids to experiment and design their own spaces. Rows don't have to be in straight lines. Eliminate adult ideas of perfection and instead shoot for enthusiasm and curiosity.

GIFT a magnifying lens to your child so they can get up close and personal with leaves, flowers, stamens and bugs.

MARVEL at the soil workers. Examine the worms and insects.

WALK around your fall landscape to choose colorful leaves for festive displays and to press into Christmas cards.

HELP them decorate for the holidays with natural berries and branches. Pyracantha, cotoneaster, and holly are filled with red berries. Wear gloves and offer help with the prickly holly and pyracantha.

BE CREATIVE by making garden art from steppingstones to scarecrows! My daughter painted a funny face on a broken rake that still guards our vegetable garden.

DOWNLOAD FREE coloring books to let kids color their world. There are seven different ones, all with botanical art that is simple and appropriate for little sprouts.
https://bit.ly/39CnSDv

Happy gardening. Happy growing. Happy December.

The pretty border plant, alyssum in purple or white is a perfect starter plant for kids. Photos Cynthia Brian

This gorgeous fall landscape at John Windle's home offers a kaleidoscope of opportuni-ties for art projects and festive compositions. Photos Cynthia Brian

Although prickly, pyracantha berries are great as holiday d�cor. Photos Cynthia Brian

A small potted spruce tree can be decorated by children now and nurtured for the next season. Photos Cynthia Brian

Cynthia Brian's little sprout gardening partner uses chopsticks to plant her seeds.

Cynthia Brian and her garden helper young sprout, Kaylee. Cynthia Brian, The Goddess Gardener, is available for hire to help you prepare for your spring garden. Raised in the vineyards of Napa County, Cynthia is a New York Times best-selling au-thor, actor, radio personality, speaker, media and writing coach as well as the Founder and Executive Director of Be the Star You Are!r 501 c3. Tune into Cynthia's StarStyler Radio Broadcast at www.StarStyleRadio.com. Buy copies of her best-selling books, including, Chicken Soup for the Gardener's Soul, Growing with the Goddess Gardener, and Be the Star You Are! Millennials to Boomers at www.cynthiabrian.com/online-store. Receive a FREE inspirational music DVD. Hire Cynthia for writing projects, garden consults, and inspirational lectures. Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com www.GoddessGardener.com

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