



Gardening Ideas for Children with Special Needs

S. Foster and J. Powell

Gardening offers many benefits to children. It can be especially beneficial for children with special needs, such as physical, mental, social, and emotional problems. Gardening is a purposeful activity involving mind and body, and it is valued by society. Benefits can include:

- improved fine and gross motor skills
- improved communication and socialization skills
- enhanced self-esteem and a sense of responsibility
- an interest in the future
- stimulation of sensory perception, creativity, and curiosity

Here are some ways to keep gardening experiences happy and successful for children of all abilities:

- Garden frequently but for short time periods.
- Keep drinks and snacks available.
- Provide child-size tools. Use small hand tools, old spoons, and plastic tool sets.
- Bigger seeds are easier to manage for smaller or less coordinated hands. Mix small seeds with sand or peat moss and sprinkle from a spice jar for better distribution.
- Vary activities often and allow frequent breaks. Let the children choose



chores they enjoy. Try to provide more encouragement than direction.

- Plant things that are quick and easy to grow that the children like (for example, snap peas instead of beets).

Let the children make the decisions as much as possible.

- Look at what happens as an interesting

opportunity to learn, rather than as a failure. Focus on ability, not disability.

- Take pictures of the children's gardening activities and display the pictures. Invite others to visit the garden or view the projects.

A gardening program can run year-round. There are many indoor horticulture-related activities, including:

- container gardening
- gardening under artificial light
- miniature and terrarium gardens
- nature crafts using pods, seeds, conifer cones, dried herbs and flowers, etc.
- carpentry projects such as birdhouses, feeders, and window boxes
- propagating plants
- drying and arranging flowers

Susan Foster, Master Gardener volunteer, and Jan Powell, education program assistant, Oregon Master Gardener Program, Oregon State University.



MAKING GARDENING EASIER

- identifying fruits and vegetables
- making salads or creating recipes and cookbooks
- gardening-related games, songs, and field trips

The possibilities are endless. The Extension 4-H Youth Program offers many resources for project ideas. Why not help your group of children form a 4-H club?

Materials, equipment, services, and funds for children's gardening programs can often be solicited from local businesses, parents, and community groups. Projects can sometimes be assisted or funded through existing programs such as 4-H, schools, or other youth organizations. Community-wide project expenses can also be offset by selling plants or produce.

Gardening is a healthful way to reduce frustration, anxiety and stress and increase receptiveness to the approach of other people. Aggressive feelings can be channeled into productive behaviors through horticultural activities.

As well as being fun, children's gardening programs teach skills that they can use in leisure and vocational activities for the rest of their life.

For More Information

Morgan, B., *Growing Together*, Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Child Guidance Foundation, 1989.

Ocone, L. and Pranis E., *The National Gardening Association Guide to Kids Gardening*, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1987.

Weeks, T., *The Columbian*, "Planting the Seeds," (pg E-1), Vancouver, WA: May 5, 1991.

Other Publications

For more information on the Master Gardener Horticultural Therapy Program, write the Oregon State University Extension Service, Oregon Master Gardener Program, 211 S.E. 80th Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97215.

Other titles available in the "Making Gardening Easier" set are:

Foster, S., Duvall, C., and Powell, J., *Adaptive Gardening Techniques for the Visually Impaired*. Oregon State University Extension Service publication EM 8498, (Corvallis, 1992).

Jewell, M., and Powell, J., *Gardening Hints for People with Arthritis*, Oregon State University Extension Service publication EM 8499 (Corvallis, 1992).

Throckmorton, E., and Powell, J., *Gardening Adaptations for People with Gripping and Lifting Problems*, Oregon State University Extension Service publication EM 8500 (Corvallis, 1992).

Foster, S., and Powell, J., *Gardening Strategies for People with Heart and Lung Problems*, Oregon State University Extension Service publication EM 8501 (Corvallis, 1992).

McNeilan, R.A., and Powell, J., *Therapeutic Benefits of Gardening*, Oregon State University Extension Service publication EM 8503 (Corvallis, 1992).

Throckmorton, E., and Powell, J., *Adapting Garden Tools to Overcome Physical Challenges*, Oregon State University Extension Service publication EM 8504 (Corvallis, 1992).

Rogers, P., and Powell, J., *Gardening with Limited Range of Motion*, Oregon State University Extension Service publication EM 8505 (Corvallis, 1992).

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