

Welcome to the Science of Parenting, a podcast dedicated to sharing scientific information with parents. I'm Lori Hayungs, Human Sciences Program Specialist Family Life for Iowa State University Extension and Outreach.

Vegetable gardening with kids can provide a variety of positive benefits. Regardless of the time of year, it's always a good time to start gardening with kids. Engaging kids in gardening can be advantageous to improving their nutrition and health, physical activity, environmental stewardship, a sense of accomplishment and relationship building with adults.

How can you begin gardening and growing with kids? Books are a great place to start the dialogue. Check out your public library and get started. A book on vegetables can get you talking about your child's favorites. Begin the discussion with descriptions on the colors, feel and taste of veggies. Visit a farmer's market or grocery store and talk about new or unusual vegetables that they might not have ever tried, but ones that they might like to learn about growing. These learning opportunity could be expanded and parents and children can explore the nutrition, and growing facts of different vegetables. Then make a list of favorites and begin to think about a garden growing plan.

Gardening with a child can reap many rewards. Kids who have the opportunity to plan, plant, and harvest are more like to eat vegetables and to continue eating vegetables throughout their life time. Gardening can also help children apply concepts learned in school. Writing, and journaling are important garden skills, and math and measurements are important in garden design. Youth can become engaged in learning more through gardening literature both nonfiction and poetry and increasing their own literacy skills through writing and recording their observations. The opportunity to experience nature and learn about plant science and horticulture shouldn't be downplayed. Physical activity is enhanced in an enjoyable way.

Family relationships can be enriched with gardening. Many adults had positive memories of gardening with a caring family members. Maybe it was because it was a fun and stress free activity! It can also be a great place to unplug from technology and turn on the communication. When parents participate alongside their children bonding and attachment are the results which in turn lead to a happier childhood.

Research has shown that children who are involved in gardening increase their consumption of fruits and vegetables. Linda Rankin, PhD Idaho State University studied adolescents involved in school gardening activities and both fruit and vegetable consumption as well as Vitamin A, Vitamin C and fiber was increased with gardening activity.

Gardening can open up a whole world of conversations to have with children; physical activity, nutrition, trying new foods, cooking, nature, caring for our earth, bugs are just a few. Connect with your county extension office for more information on kids and garden and explore what your public library has to offer. Join us this month on the Science of Parenting as we dig deeper into ideas on how to garden with kids. We will explore resources available through the cooperative extension system that can help you garden with your family and prepare vegetables that you grow. As always, we look forward to hearing from you and how you have benefited from a growing experience.