

Get Growing: Planters and Preschoolers



Have you wondered if gardening outdoors with preschoolers would be too challenging? Growing plants in containers of clean topsoil can be safer and easier for children than gardening in “plain dirt” on the ground. Here are some tips for gardening with children—from teachers who have tried it.

Get some containers to use as planters.

- Ask families to donate clean containers , such as empty milk jugs, to use as planters. Invite children to help put holes in the bottoms of these planters so water will drain out.
- Take the children outdoors to look around and decide where to place their planters. Talk to them about where they think the plants could get the most sunlight and rain. Ask them to think about which places will be easiest for them to get to when they have to take care of the plants.

Prepare the soil.

- Buy bags of plain topsoil and put some soil into a bin or wheelbarrow. Let children mix in one scoop of coarse sand and one scoop of peat for each scoop of topsoil. Offer trowels, spades, and large spoons to make mixing easy. *Note: Do not add plant foods sold in stores. They may not be safe for children.*
- Provide pails so children can fill each of the planters with the soil they have mixed.
- Have the children wear garden gloves every time they do garden work, and make sure they wash their hands when they have finished.

Start planting.

- Find out when the danger of frost will be over. That’s the time to plant the garden!
- Let children decide what to put in each planter. Let small groups of children take charge of planting and caring for specific containers.
- If the class has plants that sprouted indoors, help children carefully transplant the seedlings. Move seedlings carefully from the small peat pots to the larger planters where they will have room to grow in additional soil.
- When children are planting seeds, call their attention to what the seed packets say about what the seeds need to grow. For example, how far apart should we plant the seeds? How deep in the soil should we plant?

Tend the new garden together.

- Ask children to make signs with the name of each plant and set the signs in the right planters.
- Start a watering schedule. Children can take turns watering the plants as needed. They can practice pouring small amounts first, so they don’t drown the plants.
- Suggest some ways for the children to investigate the garden as it grows!

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



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