

Children in the garden

Question: I am an avid gardener and have my schedule worked out very well. Now, I am watching my grandchildren and the schedule has gone out the window. They want to help but I am not so sure they really can or if I want it. They are 3 and 4 years old. Any suggestions?

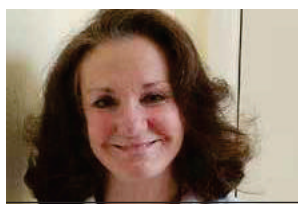
Answer: Yes, I do! This is the perfect time to introduce children to gardening.

Your patient and loving instruction will hopefully ignite a lifelong love and appreciation of gardening for them. That is a precious gift that you are in a position to give them. This time with them will allow you to impart to your grandchildren practical and basic skills that they will be able to use and to benefit from for their entire life.

They will learn much more than gardening.

Spending time teaching them about gardening is a gift that you are giving them. The gift of your time, your knowledge and your love. This special time with grandma will be the source of many happy childhood memories for them, as well as for you.

Because of this try, not to give them just busy work that doesn't benefit them, doesn't increase their knowledge and doesn't really benefit you or your garden. Most children are smarter and



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more capable than we give them credit for.

Recently, I taught my three-year-old granddaughter how and why to weed your garden. I used terms that she could understand. Also, because she is three and just learning, we started with a mulched flower bed. Weeding in mulch is much easier and sets the child up for success.

I approached it from the prospective that the weeds are the bad guys and you do not want them in your garden. Explaining that, like her, plants need nutrients, water and sunshine. And, like her, they will grow big and strong with the correct care. Weeds are bad for the garden because they want the nutrients for themselves and they will take all they can. If the weeds are not pulled quickly, they will grow so big that they block out the sun your plants need.

Before you pull the first one, be sure and explain which plants are weeds and need to be pulled and which plants not to pull. The adage that "a weed is anything growing where you don't want it" is not a good enough explanation for a child. You don't



PHOTO BY MARGO ROTEN

Margo Roten's granddaughter, Sydney Snow, age 3, of Livermore, California, learns about weeds and weeding.

want them using their own judgment – yet.

Pull the first weed and show the children the complete weed. Show them how to hold the weed securely at the base and twist it so the weed comes out, root and all. Explain that the entire weed needs to come out or it will regrow.

We piled the weeds in small piles that, as the piles grew, allowed her to measure and enjoy her success.

Other ways for them to help is making them the official Weed Warden. This job puts them in charge of looking for and reporting weeds to you. And then, together, put the weeding

on a schedule to be pulled. When you feel they have grasped the concept you can give them permission, as the Weed Warden, to pull a weed when they see it.

This will be a good introduction for them, and with spring coming, they will also be able to

help you plant, water and even help select plants.

Do you have a gardening question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners via email at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, by phone at 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg.