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Joy Jones, Oregon State University Extension Service master gardener coordinator in Tillamook County, said one of the keys to get kids interested in gardening is to get them engaged.

# Inspire kids in the garden

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**C**ORVALLIS — When grubby little hands grip your pant leg as you head for the garden, put them in the soil and they may dig up a lifetime of learning and pleasure.

“One of the keys to getting kids interested in gardening is to get them engaged,” said Joy Jones, Oregon State University Extension Service master gardener coordinator in Tillamook County. “Let them explore what catches their attention, especially small children.”

Stimulating a child’s imagination can be as simple as filling a dishpan with dirt, passing them a hand lens and letting them delve into the world that lives underground, she said. If it’s gross, so much the better.

“They love that,” she said with a laugh.

When teaching kids about gardening, Jones watches them blossom.

“We started a summer day camp about 20 years ago when there were kids interested in gardening, but no one was interested in being a 4-H club leader,” said Jones, who is also the county 4-H youth program leader. “Some of those kids went on to careers in horticulture.”

Projects vary, but a favorite is starting a miniature salad garden in a cedar box they build themselves. The kids plant fast-growing greens and perhaps onions and short carrot varieties, which are ready to harvest just in time to enter in the August county fair.

Dish gardens are popular, too. Jones said to think of a theme and go for it. One year she used blue bowls with seashells, whitewashed sand and succulents to make an ocean-themed mini-landscape. This year they’ll make a forest with dinosaurs.

“The kids have things they’ve made that they’re proud of and



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**If kids learn to grow their own fruits and vegetables, they are far more likely to eat them, according to experts.**

can take care of and share with other people,” she said. “And it’s not overwhelming.”

The benefits of teaching children to garden are well documented. If they learn to grow their own fruits and vegetables, they’re far more likely to eat them. And it gets them outside away from their phones.

“I read recently that working in the soil releases a feel-good hormone,” Jones said. “Getting kids out working in the soil, unplugged for a while, feeling and looking and being curious is really important.”

Jones’ tips for gardening with kids:

Start small. Don’t give children too many choices or they’ll get overwhelmed. Do a vegetable container or small garden plot. Allocate it just for them.

Opt for fast-growing plants. Kids tend to have a short attention span,

so have them plant carrots, onions, radishes and lettuce, which germinate and grow quickly. Slow-growers like corn, peppers or tomatoes will frustrate them.

Don’t be free labor. Teach kids how to garden and they’ll be empowered to do it themselves.

Get scientific. Soak a couple of different kinds of seeds overnight. Place between napkins and let them start to germinate. Have kids draw pictures of what they see.

Plan for success. Plant vegetables or other plants in the right conditions and water correctly so they stay healthy and kids aren’t disappointed. For containers, use a drip pan to catch water so soil doesn’t dry out as quickly. Don’t plant too many seeds in a pot or there won’t be enough room for plants to grow.

Don’t be in a rush. If kids want to look at worms, let them look at