



Gardening & Urban Homesteading with Kids

There are many reasons to encourage kids to get into gardening and urban homesteading. It is a great way to create awareness and educate them about food, nature and science. They can have fun, be involved in a family activity, learn how to problem solve, and feel proud of their accomplishments. You can get them involved in what you already do, or start a garden or other projects with them.

What is Urban Homesteading?

Urban homesteading is a growing movement, in which many people are starting to grow and raise their own organic produce, make and create essential items from scratch, connect with their community, and live more frugal, lower impact lifestyles. Also known as backyard, suburban or city farming, urban homesteading encompasses a wide range of activities, similar to what traditional farmers or agrarian people would do to provide essential elements of living for themselves. It is being done by folk living in smaller spaces, and balancing modern lifestyles too. There are many activities and projects your family can start doing.

What benefits are there for getting my kids into Urban Homesteading and growing organic food?

It can help kids learn:

- where food comes from, and to appreciate the effort put into producing food
- about protecting the Earth, the importance of supporting the soil, and the cycles of nature
- how to grow organically, without nasty chemicals, using nature's own solutions, including what role insects and garden creatures play

- how to use scraps, green waste and leftovers to make compost, or feed a worm farm
- how to preserve and cook with food they have grown
- to understand seasons and how eating by the seasons means better taste and quality
- to share their excess produce, and build their community spirit
- various skills and knowledge they can use now and in the future
- to feel good about what they are contributing, as well as become resourceful and resilient



Permaculture Principles addressed include Observe and Interact, and Use & Value Renewable Resources & Services

Let kids observe our positive actions, and encourage their interaction, in the garden and around our urban homesteads. There are many opportunities in the garden and around our urban homesteads to show our children the value of renewable resources, and how to creatively use them to have lower impact lifestyles.

How can we make gardening with kids easier and safer?

- Wear old clothes, and you may even need some standby clothes and a towel on the back patio, for quick clean up, without trampling dirt inside.
- Decide what you are going to do that day, get all the things ready, and put them into a wheelbarrow or box, so you can keep an eye on tools, seeds etc.
- Have some toys handy, so you can finish the job while they play. Or be prepared to come back to your job later.
- Have a tray with drinks, snacks, sunscreen, a portable or mobile phone on the back patio, or just inside the back door, so you can easily access what you will need.
- Wear gardening gloves, and wash hands thoroughly before eating or drinking.
- Buy kids safe tools in the right size, without sharp edges, and supervise kids using them. Store them away safely when not in use.
- Be careful with use and storage of organic fertilisers/ pesticides, and don't leave open buckets of water/ liquids sitting around.

Gardening Project Ideas

- You could start a container garden (growing in several large pots) with silverbeet, carrots, herbs, beetroot, lettuce, cherry tomatoes, dwarf beans and button squash.
- Consider converting an existing decorative garden bed, to create a rainbow garden bed, growing various seasonal delights, such as

cool season Rainbow chard, Purple carrots, Chioggia Beetroot, Sicilian Violet Cauliflower. Or in the warm season, try Purple King Beans, Green Zebra Tomatoes, Red okra, yellow Cherokee Beans, mini capsicums.

- Find a sunny spot to plant a row of heirloom sunflowers, that will look amazing, and the kids can have a go at harvesting and eating the sunflower seeds too.
- Bean tepee – grow climbing beans up a tepee style structure that is big enough for them to sit in!
- Make a scarecrow, dingly-dangly's, snail traps and other garden 'craft', to keep pests away.

What Urban Homesteading activities and projects can we do with kids?

- Cook from the garden
- Preserve food by dehydrating or lacto-fermenting
- Keep chickens (consider trialling a less permanent option, such 'rent-a-chook')
- Start a worm farm, or get a beehive
- Save seed, and make origami seed packets
- Learn how to make cheese

References & Further Reading

The Best of Jackie French, 2000, HarperCollins Publishers

Kitchen Garden Cooking with Kids, Stephanie Alexander, 2012, Penguin Lantern

The Urban Homesteading Book, Erik Knutzen and Kelly Coyne, 2010, Process



For further information on this topic, contact

Growing Home

Growing Home is a business developed by Bec Pollock, which involves urban homesteading workshops, presentations, and events. Productive, resilient and satisfying lifestyles for everyday homesteaders!

www.growinghome.com.au