

Kids Dig Vegetables

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by Annie Plowman

Fall is such an exciting time. The kids head back to school. The county fairs start their rotation. The change of seasons is in the air and soon the Holidays will be upon us. For those of us in the nursery business and the gardening world, there is the much anticipated change that comes with planting the new season's annuals and, of course, the new crop of winter vegetables.

Loose leaf lettuces thrive in the cool weather as do, carrots, radishes, broccoli, beets, peas, potatoes and onions, to name a few. Some of these do not do well in the heat of our summer because they go to seed before putting out much of a crop. It's also much easier to manage the watering in winter.

I like the winter vegetables. Many people think that the only time for a vegetable garden is in the spring and summer but winter is a great time to grow so many easy favorites and, it's a great time to get your children interested in gardening. Your children can't resist the opportunity to dig in the dirt and spend some time with you. When children are involved with a project their interest grows. Few children, or adults for that matter, can resist plucking that snap pea fresh from the vine and eating it on the spot. Your children will delight as they harvest the garden that was planted alongside mommy, daddy, grandma or grandpa.

You might be talking yourself out of the reasons why you can't grow a vegetable garden. I want you to know you can and why you should. It's really easy and it's fun.

1) You've got the space or you can make the space... Many of the winter vegetables can be grown in small gardens or containers. There's also no reason why they can't be mingled among other plantings and flower beds. Have some fun with it. If you are not having fun, you are probably doing something wrong.

2) You have enough sun... Maybe you don't have a lot of sun right now but, do you have some trees in your yard that will be losing leaves soon and shrubs that need shearing? You may have sun that you have forgotten about. Again, many of the best season's vegetables don't require a lot of space and some are forgiving when it comes to the amount of sunlight they receive.

3) You think you don't need that full six pack of vegetable starts or that full packet of seeds... Gardening is all about sharing. This is a great opportunity to reinforce that lesson with your kids. Share with friends, family, your child's school, your church. In fact, you might need more than you thought once you get in sharing mode.

4) Cost... A small crop is often close in price to what you pay just once at the grocery store... plus you will have less waste and more taste.

So, if you are like me, you like convenience. Here are a few suggestions to help you stay successful. Pick a spot where you'd like to grow some vegetables. If you are lucky, you have a small patch of real estate where you can plant a few rows of vegetables. Maybe you have a small patio where you could put some containers or a places among your flower beds to either plant or place containers. Either way, you can make it work.

The place you choose should be easy enough to access so that you won't become discouraged. If the access to the site is easy to access you'll be less tempted to neglect it. There should be a fair amount of sunlight and a source of water (sprinklers and/or garden hose). Lastly, think outside the box. If your best places are in the front yard, then don't be afraid to try something new. England has some of the most beautiful gardens in the world and home gardeners there routinely mix their edibles with ornamentals. Your local nurseries are starting to bring out the new fall/winter stock and, when the weather starts to cool a bit more, you can expect to see even more. Have great fun planting a winter vegetable garden. Your kids will dig their vegetables.

In the coming weeks, I will discuss, with more depth, some of the winter offerings, planting methods, safe pest control options and fun ideas. I encourage you to comment or email me with your success stories questions and topic suggestions!



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