



Plants for Youth Gardens

Resource Sheet

The following list describes some of our favorite vegetables, herbs and flowers to grow with youth. When choosing what to plant in your garden, consider engaging the five senses: smell, touch, sight and even sound. This list is not meant to be exhaustive, so feel free to experiment.

Vegetables

Beans, Green: Easy to grow and can be eaten right off the plant. Kids are enchanted by the purple- and yellow-colored pods.

Carrots: Kids love to dig up carrots. They rarely make it out of the garden. Try planting carrots with Seed Tapes (see lesson) to make it easier for youth to handle the small seeds.

Corn: Kids are amazed at these large plants and how quickly they grow. Try Strawberry Popcorn for something unique and colorful that makes delicious high fiber popcorn.

Cucumbers: YUM! Most kids love to eat cucumbers and you can easily cut and eat them right in the garden.

Lettuce (leaf) or Greens: Great for school gardens because it can be ready before kids leave for the summer. It can also be planted with kids in the fall when they return to school. Once lettuce bolts, it can be used as a great example for practicing seed saving.

Peas: A great early season crop that can be planted and harvested before students leave for the summer. Most kids like to nibble on them while working in the garden. Snap peas and sugar peas are popular with kids because they can eat the whole pod.

Potatoes: How fun to dig and see how many potatoes come from one plant. Look into different shapes and colors of potatoes. It is always interesting to point out that potatoes are really creeping underground stems that we eat, as opposed to a root. Keeping the potato plants well covered with soil or straw is a great activity for kids as well.

Pumpkins: Jack-O-Lanterns are always a favorite in the fall. Kids also really like the smaller varieties, which are less apt to be vandalized because they can easily hide under the leaves.

Radishes: Quick and easy to grow before the school year ends. Experiment with Easter Egg and multi-colored varieties.

Summer Squash: Zucchini or other yellow summer squash are easy to grow and are very prolific. The flowers provide a great tool to learn about pollination and are also edible.

Swiss Chard: Try rainbow chard—the kids love the colors and may give them a chance to try a very healthy leafy green.

Tomatillos: These are so easy to grow and kids love opening up the little paper coverings to discover the fruit inside. For some interesting color, try a purple variety.

Tomatoes: Kids love nibbling on the smaller varieties fresh off the vine. Try yellow pear, sweet 100s or sungold.

Herbs – Engaging the sense of smell

Basil: Try growing basil as a companion plant with tomatoes to repel whiteflies. Thai and cinnamon basil have exotic flavors. Basil is an easy herb to sell if you have a market stand.

Cilantro: This herb is great to grow in the spring or fall and is very quick growing. The seeds are easy to harvest and can be sold or used for the following crop.

Lemon Verbena: This herb is so aromatic, you tend to love collecting and smelling it all day.

Mint: Most youth love mint. You can nibble on it in the garden or make sun tea with it. It spreads easily and can be transplanted for home gardens or containers for youth to take home.

Ornamentals – Kids love color

Amaranth: Such a prolific grower. It is amazing how such a tiny seed turns into such a large plant. Look for colorful varieties. Many amaranth varieties (such as globe amaranth or elephant's nose) can be dried and mixed into selections for flower/herb wreaths.

Beans, Scarlet Runner: A vining plant, which kids love, that has red flowers that look like little birds. The flowers attract hummingbirds and fresh seeds can easily be made into necklaces. Also consider making a bean teepee.

Broom Corn: An old variety of maize that was used in the 1800s to sweep floors. Many varieties have multicolored seed heads that are a favorite food of wild and pet birds.

Cosmos: These colorful flowers are easy to grow and will return each year.

Gourds: They come in all sorts of fun shapes and sizes. Grow them on fences or let them vine on long poles tied together as teepees. Gourds are generally not eaten, but rather dried. Once dried, they can easily be made into noisemakers, eating utensils, birdhouses or painted.

Morning Glories: Youth love climbing plants and morning glories are so easy to grow.

Nasturtiums: A fun colorful edible flower.

Sunflowers: The colors, seeds and size make sunflowers a fun addition to any youth garden. Sunflower mazes or houses are a great way for youth to get out of the heat of the day. Grow mammoth sunflowers and have kids count the number of seeds at the end of the season.

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