



# GROW WITH ME!



## GROWING A VEGETABLE GARDEN WITH YOUNG CHILDREN CAN DEVELOP HEALTHY HABITS THAT WILL LAST A LIFETIME!

This fall, as you do the essential work of caring for and supporting your children, we hope you'll utilize garden-based activities as a resource. During this challenging time, gardening with children has so many benefits. First, gardens and other outdoor spaces are safe spaces where children can maintain distance while learning and practicing free play. Garden work and/or observation of nature is also calming and can provide opportunities to unwind and reduce stress, which is important for children and adults!

This newsletter is focused on equipping childcare providers and parents with ideas for easy garden-based activities that can be done at home or outside at parks or childcare centers with appropriate social distancing. The following garden-based activities do not require you to have a garden (although we hope they inspire you to start one with your child!). The activities focus on engaging your child with the natural world, building their curiosity about plants and living things and increasing their familiarity with fruits and vegetables through literacy, sensory activities, and play.



Inspire others with your gardening activities and observations! Tag us @keepgrowingdetroit on Instagram and Facebook #keepgrowingdetroitkids

These updates and activities are designed to help caregivers integrate garden-based learning into early childhood learning environments at school, at home, and in the community influencing food preferences of children birth to 5 and encouraging lifelong healthy habits! For more information: Keep Growing Detroit (KGD) 313-656-4769, [www.keepgrowingdetroit.org](http://www.keepgrowingdetroit.org) or email [Info@keepgrowingdetroit.org](mailto:Info@keepgrowingdetroit.org). Follow us on Instagram or Like us on Facebook





## RAINBOW SCAVENGER HUNT

Pick up some paint swatches from your local hardware store for these two activities that build your child's observation skills, increase vocabulary, recognize patterns and build fine motor skills.



- Give your child a paint swatch. Ask them to name the color. Ask them to find something that color in the garden or another natural environment that is that color. What did they find?
- No garden? No problem! Work with your child to cut out pictures of vegetables from a magazine or advertising circular and let your child sort and group by color.



## BUILD A CONNECTION TO THE NATURAL WORLD EXPLORE LIVING & NON-LIVING THINGS IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

Getting outside is a great way to introduce your child to the natural world and to help them build their skills of observation and engaging their senses. In this simple activity, you can go for a walk in your neighborhood or simply explore your backyard to see if you can find anything that's living. Let your children point out all the different objects they see (ex. cars, houses, insects, trees, sidewalks) and talk about each one. If you are able, find a rock to lift up or dig a small hole in the grass to see if you can find any living things. Try to engage the child's senses, stopping to listen, smell and touch things in nature. If you have a garden, it's a great place to explore living things and begin to explain to your child where the vegetables and fruits we eat come from!



## CHOP, TALK, EAT! ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO HELP WITH MEAL PREPARATION

Pull a stool up to the counter and find a safe plastic knife for your child to use to help with meal prep. The more interactions kids have with fruits and vegetables, the more likely they are to give them a try, so cooking can be a great way to build hands-on familiarity. Cutting cucumbers, using kid-scissors to snip herbs, snapping ends off beans or picking stems from cherry tomatoes are all simple things kids can do to contribute.

Family taste tests while prepping or eating meal can also be a fun way to get your child to try something new. Children's taste buds are developing and changing every day! Introducing fruits and vegetables to children prepared in different ways can be a great way to encourage them to try new fruits and vegetables. And remember, what they like today might change tomorrow, so we encourage you to introduce fruits and vegetables multiple times before giving up! In today's recipe, try offering the same vegetable in two ways to your child to see which way they (and you!) like it better. Remember, children learn by watching you, so we encourage you to try the taste test too!



## PLANT SEEDS AND WATCH CHILDREN'S MINDS GROW!



Seeds are amazing! In such a tiny little package, a seed has so much potential! Starting seeds is a great way to introduce how things grow and change in the world. Here are few simple activities to watch the amazing seed unfold into life! It will be fun to watch the seeds germinate and you can start to discuss what seeds need to grow with your child.

- Option 1: Lay a few seeds between wet paper towel and hang the bag in a sunny window. Watch it grow!
- Option 2: Start seeds at home using a cup, egg carton, or small pot. Make sure to poke holes in the bottom for drainage and then fill the pot with soil and let your child plant a seed. Keep it watered every day and set it in a sunny window and watch it grow!
- Option 3: Start a garden! Are you ready? While the two activities above are great for learning about seeds and germination, they most likely won't result in food for your family (spoiler alert!). However, growing a small backyard garden will! Visit [www.keepgrowingdetroit.org](http://www.keepgrowingdetroit.org) to learn about the Garden Resource Program and how to get seeds, plant and support to start your own garden.



## GARDEN ACTIVITIES THAT CULTIVATE SOCIAL EMOTIONAL SKILLS



Gardening with your children, either at home or in class, teaches teamwork, empathy, respect and positive human relationships. These are social emotional skills that are crucial for children to develop at a young age. Getting outside, away from screens and into the garden can also be a great way for both adults and kids to slow down and unwind, reducing stress and anxiety. Here are a few activities you can do with your child:

- **Sounds of Nature:** Find a place outside to sit with your child. Tell your child you are going to count backwards from 5 and when you reach 1, that you're going to sit quietly without talking and listen to nature. Listen for the wind, birds, insects and more. After a few minutes, talk to your child about what they heard.
- **I Do, We Do, You Do:** A garden provides numerous opportunities learn new skills and to master the art of taking turns and being patient. Children also learn to imitate behavior from watching adults and other children and then begin to initiate those behaviors on their own. Use the tasks of watering, shoveling and harvesting to practice. First have them watch you. Then try doing the activity together and finally let them try on their own. Gradually your child will build confidence with tasks and even be able to model new skills for their peers.





## GROW A LOVE OF READING WITH ME!

Books about gardening provide a great way to build your child's vocabulary and to start them on their journey to be great readers. There are thousands of great books out there. Growing Vegetable Soup by Lois Elhert is one of our favorites, with simple pictures and words describing how a dad's garden turns into a delicious vegetable soup for all to enjoy.

There are also so many garden books that can connect children to their own family's food culture and traditions.



## GROW \* SEED \* PLANT \* WATER \* BEAN \* PEA \* LET'S WRITE!

Plant a seed, write a tag. Grow a plant, draw a picture. Try a new food, write a recipe down. Gardening and cooking with your child provide numerous opportunities to creatively engage your child practice drawing and writing. Consider designating a special notebook for a garden journal or recipe book and get creative and make some artful plant tags for your garden.



## SORT, GROUP, DESCRIBE, COUNT! FUN WITH SEED SORTING!

Did we mention seeds are amazing! Some are big, some are small. They can be bumpy, pointy, round, smooth and fun to explore. Utilize old seed packs or walk around your neighborhood to find seeds of trees. Begin with a big bowl of seeds and let your child sort them out. For an extra challenge, give your child tweezers to build their fine motor skills.

