

## Gardening with Children

Gardening is a healthy and fun activity for children of all ages. There are a variety of tasks that children can be involved in such as planting, mulching, weeding, and harvesting. Show children the vegetables you will be planting so they can see the end result. This will excite them to begin the process. Use this time to discuss the fundamentals of gardening.

Consider re-using a sandbox or small kiddie pool as a garden bed. Talk about the importance of soil conditions, proper sunlight and adequate watering needed for growth. Gardening is a life skill rarely taught in school. It is a sensory experience that promotes environmental awareness. Helping children plant a small garden will stimulate their desire to grow their own flowers and vegetables. It is exciting to follow a tiny seed on its incredible journey to becoming a mature plant.

Think about the age of the child before beginning. An older child can be shown how to handle garden equipment and can do more complex tasks. Topics to be discussed can include amending the soil, working in a greenhouse, and learning the complexities of nature. Younger children usually find planting bush green beans very rewarding. This is a great starter plant.

- Place a seed into the soil in a location with proper sunlight.
- Water the seed daily (or as weather conditions require).
- Seed will sprout in about a week; first leaves are rounded.
- Look for blossoms 6-8 weeks after germination.
- Harvest beans 45-60 days after planting, depending on the variety.
- Have child check daily for insects and/or disease.

Continue monitoring along with the children, discussing the seedlings' requirements and progress. Having children grow their own vegetables teaches them the importance of healthy eating. They will develop a sense of pride in eating what they have grown. Gardening also teaches responsibility. Children have to take care of their seeds every day in order for them to become healthy plants. Gardening creates the perfect opportunity to talk about scientific concepts such as photosynthesis, pollution, pesticides and recycling. Most children enjoy being outdoors and digging in the soil. Gardening gives them the perfect opportunity to do so. Give it a try!



## Checklist for May

### **Flower and Vegetable Garden**

- ✓ Be aware that the last frost date in Ocean County will vary from May 15<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup>, depending on your location.
- ✓ Plant summer-blooming annuals and tender vegetable plants after the last frost date. Cover tender plants if frost is expected.
- ✓ Water direct seeded beds daily until seeds sprout.
- ✓ Plant dahlias, gladiolas, lilies, cannas and other summer flowering bulbs this month [How-to-gardening link](#).
- ✓ Work to eliminate weeds before they go to seed. Otherwise, you will be fighting them for years to come! [Rutgers FS020 on Weed Control Around the Home](#).

### **Trees and Shrubs**

- ✓ Remove spent rhododendron and azalea blossoms and apply a fertilizer for acid-loving plants, if needed.

### **Lawn**

- ✓ Eliminate lawn weeds. Pull by hand or spot-treat with herbicide. [Rutgers FS385 on Broadleaf Weed Control](#).
- ✓ Mow lawn as needed to keep grass height at 2½-3 inches.

### **Ticks**

- ✓ Be aware that the risk of being bitten by an infected deer tick is greatest in May and June, when the nymph stage is active. [Rutgers FSFS443 "Prevent Tick Bites."](#)