



Easy Seeds for Kids to Grow

In his book, *Last Child in the Woods*, Richard Louv points out that children are spending more time indoors, leaving less time to experience the miracle of nature. He asserts this 'nature deficit' weakens children both physically and psychologically.

Researchers from University of Illinois have done groundbreaking work that shows that exposure to ordinary natural settings may reduce symptoms of attention-deficit disorder.

Do we really need authorities to tell us that the outdoors is good for kids? If we just watch them playing outside, we see them turning over rocks to discover what's hiding underneath; their fuzzy seeds; or playing in the dirt with sticks, or better yet, their fingers.

One way to get your children interested in spending more time outside is to help them plant their own garden. Starting with bare earth and ending up with flowers or vegetables gives children a feeling of accomplishment. And who can help but be impressed by the miracle of an entire plant

growing from a tiny seed? If you want some quality time with your children this summer, choose a few packets of easy-to-grow seeds and create a garden together. Take photos of the fun and create a scrapbook – a good rainy day project.

Planning the Garden

Choose a site with lots of sun and good, well-drained soil. If your soil is less than desirable, add lots of compost to improve it. If space is a challenge, plant seeds in containers on your patio or deck.

Think about your children's interests when deciding which plants to grow. Do they want to grow flowers? Or would they rather eat what they grow? If your children are very young, choose plants with large seeds that small hands can handle easily.

Get your children some child-sized tools so they won't be discouraged trying to handle tools meant for an adult.

Flowers

Bachelor buttons (*Centaurea cyanus*) are perfect for impatient young gardeners. They bloom

within six weeks of planting. Their blue flowers attract butterflies in the garden or look beautiful in a vase on the dinner table.

Cosmos germinate very quickly and bloom all summer if dead-headed, in shades of white and pink. Cosmos also make good cut flowers and attract butterflies.

Marigold seeds are easy to handle, germinate very quickly, and bloom within two months of planting. Their flowers of white to yellow, orange to red, and combinations of these bloom all summer.

Nasturtiums are fast growing and tough. Their seeds are large, easy to handle, and germinate quickly. These plants thrive on neglect, making them perfect for a beginning gardener.



Nasturtiums are easy to grow from seed.

Pot marigolds (*Calendula*) germination. Choose dwarf magical, secretive place where have cheerful sunny flowers in varieties because they mature children can play. colors ranging from cream to more quickly.

apricot and orange. Their easy-to-handle large seeds germinate quickly and are not fussy about where they grow.

Sunflowers (*Helianthus*) belong in all children's gardens. They grow very quickly and need little care. Their seeds are large enough for even the smallest of hands to plant. Although sunflowers are available in dwarf sizes, children love to watch them grow to gigantic proportions.

Vegetables

Bush beans are easy to grow and fun to harvest. They germinate in just one week and are ready to pick in 40 to 65 days. Bush beans don't need poles or trellises. If your children want a 'bean teepee', choose pole beans that are just as easy to grow.

Carrots are underground treasures that kids love to discover. Children love their orange color and sweet taste but will have to wait for their slower

Leaf lettuce is a quick, reliable crop ready to eat in just 45 days. Plant several varieties together in a 'salad bowl' garden.

Pumpkins are an obvious choice. Seeds germinate in seven days and vines begin to grow shortly after. Pumpkins take up to 120 days to mature, but patience is rewarded when kids can carve their own pumpkin for Halloween.

Radishes may not be on your child's list of favorite vegetables, but for impatient young gardeners, radishes may be the instant gratification they demand. Radishes are easy to grow and are ready to eat in just 25 days.

Sugar snap peas are sweet and crunchy. Fifty-five days after planting, kids love picking and popping them into their mouths.

Vines

Vines grown on a teepee made from bamboo stakes create a

Morning glory vines (*Ipomoea*) grow up to 12' tall with trumpet-shaped flowers in lots of different colors. Their blooms open early in the morning and close in the afternoon. Not only kids are drawn to their beautiful flowers - hummingbirds enjoy them too. Morning glories are easy to grow but their seeds must be soaked in water overnight or nicked before planting.

Scarlet runner beans (*Phaseolus*) germinate in only 5 days and bloom in just 4-5 weeks. Flowers can be pink, red or white. Vines grow quickly to 15' and beans will be ready to harvest in 60-75 days. Scarlet runner beans also attract butterflies and hummingbirds.

Spend time gardening with your children this summer. Help them discover the wonder of nature and create memories that will last a lifetime.