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MacGregor Elementary youngsters practice photo-documenting their garden (left), growing herbs and produce for their plant sales (center), and celebrating their annual "Pulling of the Carrots" (right).

(William Isbell is at center in both the center & right phot

GARDENING WITH CHILDREN

By William Isbell

Adapted from William's full "GARDENING WITH CHILDREN"
article on the Harris County Master Gardener website

<http://hcmga.tamu.edu/Public/childGarden.aspx>

Many of my fondest childhood memories center on gardening with my grandmothers. My current affinity for gardening and the natural world is, undoubtedly, deeply rooted in those interactions. They not only served as an important bridge between our generations and afforded me access to their wisdom, but also fostered a connection to the legacy of past generations.

One of my grandmothers routinely planted a row of flowers in her vegetable garden—a tradition passed down from her mother. While modern research explains how flowers attract beneficial insects, my grandmother's reasoning was far less scientific. "We plant the entire garden to feed our bodies," she would say, "but plant a row of flowers to feed our soul." Her garden was a spiritual endeavor.

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Research supports the interconnection of gardening and the emotional, physical, and mental development of people-in particular, children. Thus, the sage wisdom they passed to me rings true, for what is "spiritual", if not the harmonious overlap of the emotional, physical, and mental realms?



Through Recipe for Success, MacGregor Elementary students learn new skills and reinforce their standard curriculum through garden-based activities in their classrooms and school garden. Photos courtesy of Recipe for Success Foundation.

As you encourage our next generation of gardeners and lovers-of-nature, here are a few tips to consider.

Don't:

- Expect young children to focus for long periods;
- Expect your time to be efficiently used;
- Tell children how to do everything;
- Make up answers to questions;
- Adhere to vigorous agendas and schedules;
- Expect to have the perfect garden.

Do:

- Encourage active, hands-on learning;
- Rely more on visual demonstrations and activities rather than verbal explanations;
- Allow mistakes to happen;
- Encourage exploration and experimentation;

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- Allow risk assessment. (If you've warned children about an ant bed, instead of forcing that lesson, allow them to determine if they will learn it verbally or physically);
- Choose vegetables with varying harvest times;
- Allow kids to assist with plant selection and placement;
- Include alternative solutions/projects;
- Allow kids to share new methods that might be unfamiliar to you but are central to how their generation processes and expresses information (i.e. social media, photo editing apps, etc); and . . .
- For my grandmother's sake, plant a row of flowers in your vegetable garden!