**Kids in the Garden**

**Growing Vegetables with Children**

If you want to grow vegetables with your children, then think about those that are easy to sow and grow and will be quick growing.  The best vegetables to grow are those that:

* Are easy to sow, especially those with large seeds like courgettes
* Germinate quickly, to keep those short attention spans occupied
* You can sow in situ, so you do not have the trouble of transplanting
* Produce a crop quickly
* Require minimum maintenance other than watering and feeding
* Will continue cropping
[](http://www.awin1.com/cread.php?s=382605&v=2283&q=82854&r=94336)

Grow food that you know your children already like or food you have a good chance of persuading them to munch.   Vegetables that you can eat straight from the plant like tomatoes are always a hit with kids.  Harvesting food is one of the best things about growing your own.

1. **Courgettes**

**Plant Out:** early spring onwards

**Harvest:** within 10 weeks from sowing

**Where to plant:** in the ground, large container (at least 30cm wide) or grow bag outdoors all in a sunny location

**What to sow:** seeds or plants

**Latest sowing time:** June

Courgettes are ideal for children to grow as it is easy to get a huge crop for very little effort.  You will only need one plant per person.  Keep any remaining seeds for next year.  The large seeds are easy to sow, will germinate in about a week and the seedlings can cope with prodding from little fingers.

Plant two seeds in a pot containing multi-purpose compost.   Each seed should be pushed in vertically.  Water well and keep on window sill.  Discard the weakest.  After 4 weeks transplant them to a permanent site.  In the ground plant at least a metre away.  Keep watering, daily if in pot or grow bag.

The bright yellow flowers and fruits of the courgettes are ornamental so if you are short of space consider planting them in a flower bed or the front garden.

Harvest when small, no more than 10cm long and, harvest at least once a week to keep the plant producing new flowers.  You will then be able to pick courgettes up until September.

1. **Carrots**

Carrots are ideal for children to grow in containers as they do not like to be moved.  So grow from seed and use a deep container (at least 20cm deep).  Check out our [growing crops in pots](http://kidsinthegarden.co.uk/plants-for-kids/growing-crops-in-pots-with-your-children/) information. The seeds are very tiny so young children will need help with sowing.

* **Plant Out:** April to July (Can sow indoors from Mid-February)
* **Harvest:** within 12 weeks from June
* **Where to plant:** Pot or the ground
* **What to sow:** seeds
* **Latest planting time:** August for harvesting baby carrots in September/October

If you want to sow early you can sow indoors in a seed tray from Mid February and then transplant outdoors in April. If sown outdoors once they have grown about 3cm thin them out by just snipping off the unwanted seedling at soil level.  If you do not do this your carrots will not develop properly.  Eating the thinnings can help maintain your child’s interest in the project.  You will need to water regularly to deter the roots from splitting.  Sow a few pots of carrots in succession so you can have a continuous supply.  If your kids can’t wait 12 weeks until they develop fully, just eat the baby carrots.

Choose carrots suited for growing in pots, those with short stumpy roots are best.  ‘Redcar’, ‘Chanteray Red Cored’ and ‘Mini Finger’ all work well in pots.

1. **Tomatoes**

Tomatoes are one of the best vegetables to grow with children and are perfectly suited for containers

* **Plant Out:** Late May after the last frost.
* **Harvest within:** 12 weeks.
* **Where to plant:** Growbag, *pot or the ground all in a sunny spot.*
* **What to sow:** Plants

Three plants will produce a lot of tomatoes in a good year, so don’t plant too many and three are just right for a grow bag.  It is therefore easiest to buy plants rather than plant from seed.  You could also try plants of different varieties.There are two types of tomato plants those with a cordon which will need the side shoots pinching out and bush type that don’t require additional maintenance.  One plant in a large pot unless you have tomatoes suited for small containers.

If you decide to grow your tomatoes in growbags it can be difficult to get the watering right.  The soil tends to dry out quickly.  There are two ways you can try and overcome this, both giving the roots more soil space.  The first is to plant the tomato in a medium sized plastic pot, cut out the bottom of the pot and then slip the whole pot into the top of the growbag.  Alternatively you could use two growbags one on top of the other.  Slice a small hole in the bottom of the top growbag just below where the tomato will grow.  Tie your plants to a garden cane or stout stick for support and, if necessary, pinch out side shoots when they appear where the leaf stalk touches the stem. Your tomato plants will require regular watering and weekly tomato feed after 6 weeks.

1. **Grow your own Tomato Sauce**

If your children like pasta you could grow your own pasta sauce.  A pot with chives, oregano, basil and parsley with the addition of a small cherry tomato such as **‘Balconi Red’** will provide you with all the essential ingredients for a tomato sauce and a really attractive arrangement.  You will also get to harvest the herbs for use in cooking other meals.

Use Tomatoes:  To ripen home-grown tomatoes, place them in a paper bag with a ripe tomato and keep at room temperature.  Have a look at the recipes and kids games at [British Tomato Growers](http://www.britishtomatoes.co.uk/index.shtml).

**Growing Fruit with Children**

The best fruits to grow with your kids are those that:

* Are easy to sow or plant, especially those with large seeds
* Germinate quickly, to keep those short attention spans occupied
* You can sow in situ, so you do not have the trouble of transplanting
* Produce a crop quickly
* Require minimum maintenance other than watering and feeding
* Will continue cropping

Grow food that you know your children already like or food you have a good chance of persuading them to munch.   Vegetables and fruit that you can eat straight from the plant, such as strawberries are always a hit with kids.  Harvesting food is one of the best things about growing your own.  Unlike vegetables you do not have to grow most fruit from seed each year, so once planted fruit bushes and trees will keep fruiting each year.

## **Growing Strawberries with Children**

Strawberries are a must for any children’s garden.  They are trailing plants so work well trailing along the ground or down from pots.  Growing in pots or hanging baskets helps to reduce the risk of slug damage.

* Plant Out: April–May
* Harvest within  12 weeks  from June
* Where to plant:  Growbag, pot, the ground, hanging basket or strawberry pot in a sunny location
* What to sow: Plant
* Latest planting time:  End of July

You can buy plants mail order or from a garden centre in the spring. Some suppliers keep plants in a cold store and will supply up to then end of July. Buy at least 6 to achieve a satisfactory crop, many more if you want to have a good supply.

Plant 3 plants equally spaced in a growbag or individual plants in 30cm pots filled peat free multi-purpose compost. You can buy also specially designed strawberry pots or plant directly into the soil in your garden (40cms apart) in a sunny location.  If your garden is home to lots of slugs and snails then planting so the strawberries can hang off the ground is highly recommended.

Plants growing in growbags and containers will need weekly plant food after 6 weeks, whereas plants in the ground they won’t.

As the fruit starts to colour, cover the plants with netting to protect from the birds.  Plants crop better from the second year and in the ground rather than in containers.

## **Get the Children to grow Free Strawberry Plants**

You can get strawberry plants for free as they spread by producing runners – new small plants.  This is a great project for kids.  When they find a runner keep it attached to the main plant dig a small hole in the soil under it. Place a pot with multipurpose compost in the hole.  If the parent plant is in a pot then just rest the new pot on the surface of the soil.   Push the new plant into the pot and secure with a paperclip.  Water the pot and as soon as the plant begins to grow, usually 3 to 4 weeks, cut the runner.  Your children can see that growing new plants is really that easy.

## **Growing Blueberries with Children**

Reduce your carbon footprint by growing your own blueberrries, now a firm children’s favourite.  The bush can be ordered and planted in the winter. They are prefect for growing in containers and once planted will keep growing year after year, just like your kids.

* Plant Out:  When it arrives
* Harvest:  July/August
* Where to plant:  In a large container outdoors filled with ericaceous compost
* What to plant : Bush

You can plant blueberries almost at any time of the year from container – grown plants either ordered online or brought from you local garden centre.  They grow to about 1.5metres high so you will need a large container.

The flowers are attractive white or pink bell shaped and fragrant too. The blueberry bush also gives very good autumn and winter colour, in both leaves and stems.  Have a look at the choices at [Blackmoor nurseries](http://www.blackmoor.co.uk/). Blue Pearl is a late season compact blueberry with lots of fruit and perfect for growing in small spaces.

Feed from the end of April.  As the fruit starts to colour, cover the plants with netting to protect from the birds.

When pruning is required it is best done in the winter.  When the bush is three years old start to remove one or two of the less productive stems to ground level. Thereafter remove about a quarter of old main stems each year.