

Buzz Worthy

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Kids Nowadays

Ellen C. Wells



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I enjoy vegetables as much as the next person. More so, even, since I'm a vegetarian. Actually, I'm a pescatarian, but that's neither here nor there. Let's just agree that I eat veggies willingly. And I think I always have. Yes, Mom, I know you might disagree with that, but it's really only peas I don't like.

I don't have children but I've watched enough television commercials to know that children, as a rule, won't get near vegetables with a 10-ft. pole, or maybe I should say a 10-ft. fork. My only comparison is my dog, Osa. Dogs, as you may or may not know, are omnivores and will eat anything—even a five-day-old burrito hidden under a bush (I speak from experience). Osa's food, which I make from fresh ingredients, contains tons of veggies—carrots, spinach and, yes, even peas. She gobbles it down. Sure, she'll look at me quizzically when I stuff her Kong bone with carrots instead of freeze-dried beef lung. But give her a minute and those carrot chunks will disappear.

What, your child doesn't eat freeze-dried beef lung?

But back to human children for a moment. This human was a farmer's kid. I saw where my veggies were grown and how they were cared for. I helped plant them and harvest them. And, most importantly, I helped "put them up," as they say. I remember countless hours of shelling peas (hey, maybe that's why I never liked them!), cutting the ends off of green beans and shucking and de-hairing ears of corn while trying to get a tan on the back porch, General Hospital on the TV in the background. Good times, I'm telling you.

When considering the topic of children and gardening, the preparing and eating of the food you grow is where I think edibles have an edge over flowers for kids. In my case, what we harvested and prepared for canning and freezing literally sustained us until next year's harvest. Because of that, I realized the harvests' importance. I knew the work that my family put into preparing what my daily plate held. And because of that, I ate the vegetables. (Well, not the peas. Never the peas.)

Kids nowadays could stand getting to know their vegetables more intimately. I still feel quite childlike when I pull a carrot out of the ground. I experience the thrill of "My gosh, what's this one gonna look like?" as I tug on the carrot tops. And then to wash it off and eat it, not because I'm hungry but because I just want to taste it—that's just such an awesome feeling! It's such a kid-like thing to do. Vegetable gardening is not only tangible, it's tasty, too.

Plant the seed and help it grow, bloom and fruit. There are so many lessons for children in that process. Science

and technology! Engineering! Patience! Cooperation! Nutrition! Did I mention patience? The thing they've nourished ends up nourishing them—or their neighbors in need. That's a valuable message for kids. And adults, too, for that matter.

Back to that patience. Kids don't have a lot of it, I do know that. They may water and pull a weed or two, but then a fluttering butterfly pulls their attention away and you've lost them for the day. That's why I think the best "gateway gardening" technique to get them hooked on edibles happens indoors. Whether it's a bright windowsill with a basil plant, a countertop self-watering growing system or a retrofitted closet with racks and lights for growing salad mixes, the scale and workload of growing food indoors is ideal for children. You may be marketing your indoor grow systems to dudes of a certain age and hair style, but don't count out kids. They would really dig it. **GP**