



kidding around

I have two little ones who love to help me garden. What can I do to make our landscape more child-friendly?



Text by Troy Bankord • Illustration by Clint Miller

Creating a garden for children can be fun and rewarding. Tending to flowers, plants and vegetables gives them a sense of responsibility and instills an appreciation of nature. When planning this type of garden, it's important to keep everything on a smaller scale, and to get input and help from your youngsters.

Let them pick out plants from a nursery and then put them in the ground. To enliven the garden, consider encircling it with a fence, and having your kids paint it a bright color. Or, if the area backs up to a wall, have your children and their friends paint a one-of-a-kind mural on it.

Elevation changes, curving paths, hidden corners and lush, junglelike spaces appeal to young ones, as do colorful welcome signs, wind chimes, flags and other decorative outdoor elements. Painting plastic garbage cans, galvanized watering cans and flower pots is a fun family project that will enhance the space. Following are more ideas for a child-friendly garden.

- Create raised planting beds with blocks, stone, railroad ties or even recycled tires. The tires simply need to be stacked, held in place with stakes, painted in cheerful colors, and filled with soil.
- Since children tire and get frustrated easily,

use composted soil that is easy to work with, and provide them with small-scale garden tools.

- Use tree stumps to fashion seats and a table.
- Install desert plants to instill an appreciation for native vegetation.
- Encourage wildlife to visit by including whimsical birdhouses and feeders. Plant penstemon, aloe, ruellia, bat-faced cuphea or *Salvia greggii* to attract hummingbirds; and verbena, lantana, butterfly bush and pentas to draw butterflies.
- Include vegetation that can be cut and brought into the house, such as daylilies, bat-faced cupheas, geraniums, snapdragons, penstemons, varieties of daisies, gaillardias, pentas, irises, stock, foxglove, hollyhocks and canna lilies.

When selecting plants, be careful of thorny or poisonous varieties. Oleander, pyracantha and such euphorbia species as crown of thorns and pencil euphorbia are a few harmful ones to avoid. Check with your nursery about other poisonous plants.

Have fun, and cheers for encouraging a future generation of gardeners.

Principal of T.M. Bankord Inc., Troy Bankord is an award-winning Valley landscape contractor and environmental and interior designer.