

Tricks of the Trade

Gardening

Spring is in the air! Help your little ones celebrate spring and the season of new beginnings. Get your hands dirty and introduce gardening. Get the kids out there to help dig up holes, plant bulbs, spread mulch, even pick up branches that fell from the trees over the winter.... They'll love an excuse to get dirty!

Tricks of the Trade is a new monthly column that incorporates activities, nutrition and quick boredom busters to make your life at home a little easier. We will leverage items you have on-hand or low-cost items to keep the kiddos busy learning while having fun and staying healthy. Each month will feature a different theme.

Activities/Crafts - Gardening

Plant Beans Although any seed will do, beans typically grow the quickest. Start seeds indoors by planting in an egg carton, and transplant outdoors after the last frost of the season (Typically mid-late May). Have children use cotton balls to water the seeds.

Get Even More Creative When you transplant outside, create a tee-pee by using poles for the sprouts to climb up as they grow! (See www.rebeccaplants.com for a video).

Have a Little Scientist? Older kids can take pictures (or draw pictures), to chart their plant's growth over the summer.

Beach Bucket Garden Children can use beach bucket to grow plants. They can carry their "garden" wherever they go. Cut drainage holes in the bottom of a plastic beach bucket. Write the child's name on a bucket and have them decorate with markers or stickers. Fill bucket halfway with potting soil, then help transfer plants. Recommended plants include: marigolds or zinnias, or a dwarf cherry tomato plant. Add more soil as needed. Children can help water their plants.

Decorate Pots A great gift idea for mother's day. Decorate pots with paint, stickers, or even paste on pictures of flowers from your favorite magazine.

Caterpillar Great for different ages. Items needed: cardboard egg carton, green craft or poster paint, pipe cleaners, and markers. Cut through the center section of a cardboard egg carton, making the long six cup section the body of the caterpillar. Paint the outside with green paint. Mom, using scissors make 2 small holes in the bottom of the first egg holder. These holes will be for "threading" the pipe cleaner. After paint dries, use a marker to make eyes, nose mouth. Thread the pipe cleaner in the hole to make the antenna.

Read Suggested books about gardening and bugs:

"How a Seed Grows" by Helene Jordan
 "The Hungry Caterpillar" by Eric Carle
 "Eating The Alphabet" by Lois Ehlert

Giggles and Nibbles

Tip of the month: You may be surprised to find out that you are eating more servings of fruits and vegetables than you thought. On average, us moms need about 2 cups of fruit and 2 ½ cups of vegetables every day. Our 2-3 year olds only need 1 cup of fruit and 1 cup of vegetable everyday. 4-8 year olds need 1½ cups of each every day. For more information, visit www.fruitsandveggies-matter.gov/downloads/General_Audience_Brochure.pdf

Edible Veggie Bowls

Cut a pepper or tomato in half and hollow out the seeds. This will be your veggie bowl. Cut various vegetables into skinny sticks: carrots, celery, peppers, zucchini, summer squash. You can also try asparagus. Place salad dressing in the bottom of your veggie bowl. Add veggie sticks to the bowl. Children can dip the veggies in their bowls. For extra fun, you could also use mini flower pots as your veggie bowl!

Mini Dirt Desserts: Healthier Version!

2 cups cold fat-free milk
 1 package (1.4 ounces) sugar-free instant chocolate pudding mix
 1 carton (8 ounces) reduced-fat whipped topping
 1 package (16 ounces) reduced-fat chocolate cream-filled sandwich cookies, crushed
 Gummy worms, optional

Directions:

In a bowl, whisk milk and pudding mix for 2 minutes. Fold in whipped topping. Divide a third of the cookie crumbs and half of the pudding mixture among 10 dessert cups; repeat layers. Top with remaining crumbs. Garnish with gummy worms if desired.
 Yield: 10 servings.

Bugs and Dirt (recipe from Brenda Hyde at SeedsOfKnowledge.com)

Chocolate graham crackers
 Chocolate sprinkles (ants)
 Gummy worms
 Raisins (beetles)

Directions:

Crush the graham crackers with a rolling pin. Place into a bowl then add the ants, beetles and worms to the "dirt." Place the bowl in the middle of the table with a clean sand shovel and let each child scoop up a cup of dirt and bugs. You can let them eat with their hands or spoons. This is also great for outside at the picnic table, using small paper cups or plastic bags for their treats. The real backyard critters will help clean up the mess on the grass!

Tricks of the Trade (continued)

Giggles and Nibbles (continued)

Banana Bugs

Have the kids poke pretzel sticks into a not-too-ripe banana for legs and antennae. Use peanut butter for eyes and use as glue to attach a raisin spine.

Cucumber Caterpillars

Slice washed, unpeeled cucumbers into 1/2" medallions. Overlap the slices on a platter to make them look like caterpillars. Using cream cheese as glue, adhere slivers of shredded carrots for antennae and legs, and raisins for eyes.

Quick Boredom Busters

Paint

Painted Rock Playset from Disney Family

1. Kids can gather different size/shape rocks in a bucket.
2. Wash rocks and let dry.
3. Use outdoor acrylic paint to paint silly designs: animals, flowers, letters, stripes, shapes, or polka dots.
4. Place indoors or out in your garden (some paint may fade in the sun). Children can stack or sort rocks. Help them create a path in the yard.

Discover

The spring is a great time of year to teach children about fruits and vegetables. Try placing different fruits and vegetables into a paper bag. Have your child try to guess which fruit or vegetable is hidden in the bag by feeling the item with their hands. NO PEAKING PLEASE!

Interesting items to try:

1. A carrot with the leaves still attached (especially for those whom have only seen baby carrots).
2. Star fruit: when you slice this, it really looks like stars.
3. Kiwi fruit: great texture
4. Pea Pods: children love opening the pods and finding peas inside.

Sing!

The Bugs in the Garden

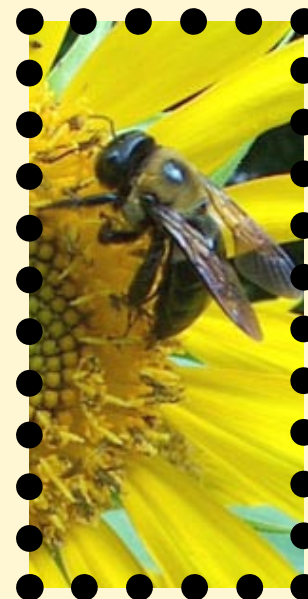
(to the tune of "The Wheels on the Bus")

The fireflies at night go blink, blink, blink
 Blink, blink, blink, blink, blink, blink
 The fireflies at night go blink, blink, blink
 Out in the garden.

The bees in the flowers go buzz, buzz, buzz
 Buzz, buzz, buzz, buzz, buzz, buzz
 The bees in the flowers go buzz, buzz, buzz
 Out in the garden

Other verses:

crickets/fields/chirp
 ants/in the grass/march
 caterpillars/on the leaves/munch
 spiders/in the bush/spin their webs
 butterflies in the sky/go flit,
 ladybugs on the wall/have lots of spots
 worms/in the ground/wiggle and squirm
 mosquitos outside/they get smacked



I'm A Little Butterfly

(to the tune of
 I'm A Little Teapot)

I'm a little butterfly
 I have wings
 I fly around
 And see all things.
 When I see a flower
 That looks great
 I call out
 To all of my mates.