

## *Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian*

### **Growing with kids**



Jacobinia, known as the flamingo plant, is an easy plant for kids to propagate with cuttings.



Tomatoes are a rewarding vegetable for children to grow.



Raking leaves is great exercise for kids.

Photos Cynthia Brian

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**Nutrition:** If they grow it, they will eat it! If you were to ask a child where zucchini comes from, unless they are growing a garden, they will probably tell you that it comes from the grocery store. Once when I was doing a gardening demonstration for children, kids asked me why the iceberg lettuce on my demonstration plant wasn't wrapped in cellophane. A similar question arose when my chicken laid an egg during a petting zoo visit.

"What's that?" the child asked.

"An egg," I responded.

"What do you do with it?" the child retorted.

"You cook it and eat it. It's fresh," I answered.

"But it's not in a carton!" was the prompt and surprised look on the child's face.

We need to teach children about where our food comes from as well as the benefits and nutritional values of growing our own produce. In this way, they will establish healthy eating habits.

**Life-Skills:** Perhaps more than anything, gardening instills skills and qualities that will last a lifetime fostering cognitive development and problem-solving skills. Patience, creativity, curiosity, tolerance, generosity,

responsibility, pride, and respect are just a few of the virtues that we all learn in the garden. We can't rush a tomato. We must be patient and learn that delayed gratification reaps rewards. Designing a garden stimulates creativity and imagination. When we investigate the insect crawling on the artichoke, our curiosity is aroused. Tolerance of misshapen or imperfect crops is necessary. We are responsible for our plant's life by providing it the essentials it needs to survive – soil, sunlight, water, and food. When we harvest, we feel pride that we have succeeded and are generous by sharing the bounty. Respect, empathy, and compassion for all living things are grown in the garden. Also important, gardens teach us that mistakes are normal. Failure is fertilizer. When a plant dies, heap it on the compost pile and grow a new garden. Through gardening, children learn that there is no perfection, giving them the permission to take measured risks.

**Environmental Awareness:** Through caring for a garden, kids develop a deeper appreciation for nature. They better understand the impacts of their actions and how they can personally contribute to a greener, cleaner planet. When kids connect with nature, they will want to protect and conserve the environment for future generations. They will develop a lifelong appreciation for nature's beauty and grandeur.

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