



Why concentrate on growing, gardening and nature exploration in Early Years

Providing gardening opportunities for babies and young children will enable them to connect with the living environment, something that not all children have access to often enough. Regular hands on experiences with plants, animals and insects provide an essential part of learning and development as well as supporting children's emotional and physical health and well-being.

Enabling children to get outdoors more and experience the natural world will support them to flourish in many ways and offer a wide range of experiences including:

- **Encouraging the exploration of different foods**

Children who are involved in preparing the soil, growing seeds, planting seedlings, caring for fruit and vegetables will be more motivated to find out what food tastes like when it has been harvested. You can incorporate your harvest into cooking/tasting activities.

- **Providing a variety of ways to be physically active**

Children will have the opportunity to dig, rake and plant as well as lots of lifting and carrying, pushing wheelbarrows and watering. These activities will not only help to develop their fine and gross motor skills but also offer physical activity for exercise too.

- **Improving their social skills**

Children will be supported to take turns, share tools and resources and work as part of a team to achieve a greater goal together. They can also start to think about others in wider community - if there is a glut of produce this can be shared with other community groups.

- **Using all of their five senses**

Children can explore plants that stimulate all of the senses. When planning your gardening area think about the colour, shape, smell and texture.

- **Awareness of the world around them**

Children will have opportunities to learn where their food comes from, what makes plants grow, the lifecycles of plants and animals, understanding of seasons, the weather, wildlife and recycling through your gardening projects.

- **Building self confidence**

There can be a huge sense of achievement in gardening when you can see what your hard work has produced.

- **Developing a sense of time**

Some plants grow fairly quickly but they are not ready immediately. Being involved in growing lets children understand more about the necessity of waiting for some things, particularly with plants where they can see new growth each day and are rewarded with the harvest at the end.

All of the experiences above provide opportunities to support and extend children's learning through the Early Years Foundation Stage.