

## KIDS IN THE GARDEN



Gertrude Jekyll, the celebrated English garden writer, thought so much of introducing children to the joy of gardening that she devoted a classic 1908 book, Children and Gardens, to the subject. In it she suggested that "...autumn is the time to plant little gardens."

Many parents find gardening an excellent way to spend quality time with their children, teach lessons such as environmental awareness and the workings of nature, and have a liberal

dose of good old-fashioned family fun. Jekyll had an additional thought. She felt that it was not so much the vegetable or flower garden but the pure fun of digging in the dirt that was the real key to instilling an interest in gardening in children.

Fall, with its many garden tasks, offers plenty of this kind of fun. Raking leaves into piles, for example, is work to an adult but can be satisfying for a child.

Planting is another pleasant chore for young and old. Autumn is the season to plant trees, turf grasses, and spring-blooming flower bulbs such as tulips, daffodils, hyacinths, and crocuses. Children will especially have fun with "naturalizing," the planting of bulbs to achieve a natural look. It's easy to do. Just grab a handful of bulbs, toss them out on the target area, and plant them where they fall.

Fall is also the season to reseed the lawn, fix bare spots, or even renovate the entire lawn. Although a full-scale renovation is probably not a job for children, reseeding small areas can be fun for them. Their active participation in the process may help parents convince them to stay off newly seeded areas, thus giving the new grass a chance.

In her writings, Jekyll suggested that children begin their gardening experience by helping their parents tend to existing plantings. Later, they should be given a spot of their own in which to create a small garden. She advised her readers not to put the children's garden in a marginal area or back corner but to give them a prime location where they can take pride in showing off their accomplishments.

Writing in a "pre-indulgent" age when "spare the rod and spoil the child" was a maxim of proper parenting, Jekyll also firmly stated that "...children should be provided with proper tools." In her day, acceptable implements had to be custom-made by clever country blacksmiths.

Today, child-sized tools including trowels, spades, rakes, hoes, blunt weeding tools, small wheel barrows, and baskets for weeding and harvesting, are available through mail order catalogs or many garden centers. You may want to buy now for gift giving this Christmas.

Of course, fall with its apple picking, pumpkin carving, and many outdoor chores is only the beginning of gardening as a family activity. Come spring, when you are enjoying your new lawn or spring-flowering bulbs, take time to involve your children in planning and planting the flower and vegetable garden.

Gertrude Jekyll, thinking back to her own youth, wrote that she thought at that time there were "...only two types of people in the world--children and grown-ups--and that the world really belonged to children. And I think it is because I have been more or less a gardener all my life that I still feel like a child in many ways."