

Along the Garden Path

Gardens fascinate young children. Visiting a produce farm or garden helps young children experience how food grows. Many children are eager to try a vegetable that they helped to harvest. Use these ideas for making a visit to produce farms or gardens a success for all involved.

Options Abound

Many fruit and vegetable producers have options for visitors at harvest time. Pumpkin patches and U-pick apple orchards are two familiar and widely available choices. Most often these places charge a price for admission. They make a great end of season celebration trip. Here are some options for getting into garden spots during the planting and growing season for little or no cost.

USDA People's Garden Initiative

The United States Department of Agriculture has launched the People's Garden Initiative – a program to establish gardens in a variety of public places throughout the country. The goal of the program is to help expand the availability of garden resources to all

Americans. The gardens are planted and maintained by USDA employees and volunteers on USDA lands and other public locations. See if a garden is located in your area and what options are available for children to visit.

Master Gardeners

The USDA Cooperative Extension Service has an extensive network of master gardeners throughout the country. These highly-trained garden volunteers provide resources and education in local communities. Check with your local Extension Service to find master gardeners in your area. Master gardeners are passionate about gardening; hopefully one will share their joy with children in your care. Plan a family night. Invite a master gardener to talk to families about how to grow their own vegetables.



Community Supported Agriculture

Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs) produce vegetables, fruits, and some times other agricultural goods. CSAs sell shares of the crop yield to local families. These are true production gardens. They usually plant a wide variety of foods that grow well in an area throughout the entire growing season. A CSA might be willing to have a group of children visit to see how many different foods are grown. It would be interesting to visit more than once to see how the garden produce changes over the season. Sometimes a CSA has a bountiful crop and will have extra produce available for sale to the public. Children rarely refuse to try a vegetable they have seen growing and brought back from a garden.

American Community Garden Association

Living in a city and think there are no produce gardens close by? Think again! The American Community Garden Association (ACGA) is dedicated to helping establish gardens in urban, suburban, and rural areas on vacant lots, public grounds, and roof tops – anywhere a garden can grow. Volunteer groups tend the gardens and share the bounty of fresh produce with local residents.

Farmers Markets

If you can't visit a producing garden, do the next best thing. Visit a Farmers Market to



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see the crops in season. Farmers Markets usually run from spring to the last days of autumn and are a great place to see the seasonal variety of foods produced locally.

School Gardens

Many schools have school gardens tended by volunteers during the summer months. Contact your local school district. Find out the location of school gardens and how to arrange a visit.



Visit a Local Nursery

Find out where plants get their start. Visit a local nursery or home supply store in the spring and early summer. Show the children how a plant grows with various size starts of the same type of plant. Buy an easy-to-grow plant for each child – for a garden or container garden at the center or to take home to family. Be sure to include growing directions for any plants sent home.



Botanical Gardens

Check for your local botanical garden's education options. Some offer programs at child care centers during the 'off season' in addition to growing season tours. Children's gardens or vegetable plots are common areas in botanical gardens.



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Grow It! Try It! Like It!

Find more garden-themed education resources in *Grow It! Try It! Like It! Preschool Fun with Fruits and Vegetables* from USDA's Team Nutrition resource library at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Resources/growit.html>.



Search for local garden options at these Web sites.

Farmers Markets – <http://apps.ams.usda.gov/FarmersMarkets/>

Cooperative Extension System Offices – <http://www.csrees.usda.gov/Extension/>

Community Supported Agriculture – <http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/csa/csa.shtml>

American Community Garden Association – <http://communitygarden.org/>

USDA People's Garden Initiative Garden Locations –

http://www.pubinfo.usda.gov/garden/Map_View.cfm

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