



It is wonderful to get kids interested in gardening. Give them a packet of seeds and a little spot of their own, show them what to do, and watch the magic happen.

Spending time in the landscape with children, especially young ones, requires adults to pay careful attention. Just as you would childproof an indoor room, it's important to take safety precautions in the yard to keep young ones safe. The following are some tips on outdoor safety with children.

- Never leave a toddler or young child outdoors unattended.
- As they become old enough to understand, teach your children never to eat any plant unless an adult is supervising. While eating fruits and vegetables you've grown yourself is part of the joy of gardening, many common ornamental plants can make you sick if

you eat them since some can be very poisonous.

A free list of common poisonous plants is available from the Galveston County Extension Office, or check out the many excellent poisonous plants sites on the Internet.

- Speaking of poisonous plants, make sure that poison ivy is not allowed to grow in your landscape. Watch for this vine with three-part leaves and immediately eliminate it if you find any. If needed, herbicides such as glyphosate and trichlopyr can be used to control it.
- Do not allow children to eat soil from the garden. Some soils could contain relatively high amounts of lead or other toxic substances and should not be consumed.
- Check for plants with spiny leaves or thorns — such as cactuses, roses, yucca, hollies or pyracantha. Point out any

potential hazards to children and fence off areas or plants that should be avoided. Remove dangerous plants, if necessary, especially if they are close to a play area. Do not plant spiny plants next to raised porches, decks or steps where children might fall into them.

- Be careful with sharp tools and discuss with your children which tools are safe for them to use and which are not. When you lay down tools between use, place forks, rakes and other pointed tools with the tines down.

If kids are around, keep your eye on the tools you lay down when you are not using them — or put them away promptly when they are no longer needed.

- If you want your kids to do some gardening, it's a good idea to purchase tools specially made for children and properly sized for them to use. This gives them a chance to identify more closely with gardening, since they have their own tools. It's safer, too.

- Despite their sometimes colorful labels, garden chemicals can be very dangerous if mishandled. If you have garden pesticides, be sure to store them in locked cabinets in their original containers. This includes organic pesticides, some of which are quite toxic.

Never use empty food or drink containers for storing



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pesticides, cleaning supplies or fertilizers. Do not leave pesticide containers out while using them. Put them up promptly in a safe location after you have mixed the material.

Children should never be around while pesticides are being mixed or applied.

- Be especially watchful of young children around ponds, pools, large puddles, buckets and large containers of any sort. Fence off ponds or other aquatic features if necessary.

- Most insects in the garden are harmless. Even insects that can sting, such as bees and wasps, generally will not be a problem if they are left alone. Do, however, watch out for potential problems and discuss with your children how best to deal with insects they encounter and precautions they should take.

Control any fire ant hills in the area where children are likely to play or garden.

- Use stakes taller than your toddlers for plants that need support. Short stakes can cause eye injuries to kids. Adults should also be careful around stakes.

- Though fences are no substitute for a watchful eye, they offer a good option to helping keep a wandering young one in bounds. Rails are especially important on high decks to prevent falls.

Also, keep deck furniture away from all railings of raised decks or balconies, since children can climb onto the furniture and over the rails.

- Always wash hands after gardening and use antiseptics on cuts or scrapes.

- Store the gas tanks for propane grills so that children cannot reach the knobs.

- Do not operate a lawn mower or string trimmer (aka “weed eater”) when children are in the yard, even if they are well away from you. These powerful tools can throw objects considerable distances with great force. It’s also a good idea to check adjoining yards to see if kids are in the area.

- Make sure there is no direct access to the street or driveway from the children’s play area.

