

Grow your own school lunch box!

by Noni Young

Gardening is a great activity for the kids. It stimulates their minds, gets them outdoors and connects them with nature. Growing their own vegies is a great option. It is a well known fact that children are more likely to eat fruit and vegetables that they have grown themselves. So, in keeping with the 'back to school' theme of this issue, get the kids growing their own healthy food to fill their school lunch box.

What do you need?

- Seeds or seedlings from your local nursery.
- A raised garden bed or containers with good drainage, positioned in full sun.
- Compost and manure for the garden beds.
- A good quality potting mix for the containers.
- A liquid plant food that is suitable for vegetables.

What to plant?

- Herbs such as basil, parsley and coriander are extremely easy to grow and will add flavour to any lunch box.
- If you get in quick, it's not too late to plant some summer favourites. These include cucumbers, cherry tomatoes, strawberries, blueberries and sweet corn.
- Or you can choose to go with the favourites that can be planted anytime of the year such as carrots, lettuce and snow peas.

What next?

- Make it a daily ritual for the kids to water the vegies and check for pests and disease.
- Caterpillars, slugs and snails can be easily removed by hand and won't cause too much damage if checked on a regular basis. Nets can be used to protect the crop from birds and pesky possums.



- Mildew and Rust are the most common diseases that can affect the vegie patch. These will show up on the leaves in the form of a white coating (Mildew) or orange/yellow spots (Rust). Diseased leaves should be picked off and disposed of in the household waste. Watering the soil and not the foliage will also help to minimise these diseases.
- Fertilise with the liquid plant food once a week as per the instructions on the pack.

Harvest Time!

The growing time will depend on the type of vegetable but, for a seedling, the average is around 6 - 8 weeks. Growing from seeds will take longer. The plant label will provide specific information for that vegetable. Considering the time to first harvest it's always a good option to plant seedlings a few weeks apart so the kids can have a regular, uninterrupted supply of their favourites.

Then all that's left is for the kids to harvest for their own home-grown school lunch box!

Enjoy.

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