

## Gardening in Early and Middle Childhood

### Essential Reading List

Since the publication of “*Children and Gardens*” by famed landscape designer Gertrude Jekyll in 1908, there have been many books on gardening with children. In addition to this selection by the Children & Nature Network, see “*What’s In Our Library? A Compilation of City Blossoms’ Favorite Books for Kids and Their Educators*,” a 2023 collection of more than 200 garden, nature and food-themed books for children ages 2–10, including board books for babies, picture books, garden songs and rhymes, and early reader books for kindergarten through seventh grade. [Link to PDF](#)

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***The Best Ever Step-by-Step Kid’s First Gardening: Fantastic gardening ideas for 5-12 year olds, from growing fruit and vegetables and fun with flowers to wildlife gardening and outdoor crafts.***

Jenny Hendy. Discover Books, 2017. 256 pages.

This book offers step-by-step directions for 120 gardening projects for ages 5–12. The introduction covers basics about how plants grow, their planting and care, and sustainable gardening. Eight chapters present projects that include indoor gardening, wildlife gardening, edible treats and garden crafts. Illustrated with 1,100+ color photographs. [Link to information](#)

***Gardening with Children.*** Monika Hanneman, Patricia Hulse, Brian Johnson, Barbara Kurland, & Tracey Patterson. Brooklyn Botanic Garden, 2015. 120 pages.

This handbook written for parents, teachers and community gardeners to introduce children to the pleasures of gardening comes from Brooklyn Botanic Gardens, home of the oldest continuously operating children’s garden in North America. In addition to instructions for growing a variety of plants from seed, it includes activities for children to investigate nature’s cycles and garden ecosystems, science experiments, journal keeping and garden arts and crafts. Colorfully illustrated. [Link to Publisher](#)

***Gardening with Emma: Grow and Have Fun: A Kid-to-Kid Guide.*** Emma Biggs & Steven Biggs. Storey Publishing, 2019. 144 pages.

Written by 13-year-old Emma with some help from her father, this book shares Emma’s enthusiasm for growing plants as well as having fun in the garden. Its colorfully illustrated pages written for ages 8–12 cover basics like providing the growing conditions that different plants need, planting to attract beneficial insects, removing unwanted insects without toxic pesticides and growing through the seasons. It includes Emma’s recommendations for favorite plants, specialty gardens like pizza gardens and how to provide play spaces among plants. [Link to Publisher](#)

### **Series: Junior Master Gardener**

Junior Master Gardener, or JMG, is an international child and youth gardening program of the Cooperative Extension network, based in Texas A&M University. It engages young people in hands-on individual and group experiences to cultivate a love of gardening and appreciation of the environment. For its books and curricula for preschool and elementary school students, explore [their website](#).

- **Learn, Grow, Eat & GO! Early Childhood.** 2021. 154 pages.  
A garden-based curriculum for teachers of preschools, Head Start programs, and kindergartens. This four-week curriculum includes learning about plants and gardens, recipes for healthy eating, physical activities for the brain and body, garden songs and stories, and ideas for parent engagement. [Link to Website](#)
- **Junior Master Gardener Teacher and Leader Guide, Level 1.** 2016. 416 pages.  
This guide for elementary school teachers presents gardening activities that apply skills from across the curriculum, help develop life skills, and provide opportunities for service learning. As students complete areas of study, they can earn recognition certificates that include Certified Junior Master Gardeners. [Link to Website](#)
- **Junior Master Gardener Handbook, Level 1.** 192 pages.  
The elementary school students' book that accompanies the Teacher and Leader Guide. It contains eight chapters of discovery learning activities that children follow to earn their certification as a Junior Master Gardener. [Link to Website](#)
- **JMG Golden Ray Series: Wildlife Gardener.** 230 pages.  
The National Wildlife Federation and JMG combined forces to produce this guide for learning about local wildlife and creating wildlife habitat. Students can culminate their learning through community service by developing a National Wildlife Federation Certified Schoolyard Habitat. [Link to Website](#)
- **JMG Golden Ray Series: Literature in the Garden.** 224 pages.  
This curriculum combines six Growing Good Kids Book Award-winning titles, awarded by JMG and the American Horticultural Society, along with outdoor activities to explore nature, creative expression, and the application of skills in math, science, language and social studies. [Link to Website](#)

**My First Garden: For Little Gardeners Who Want to Grow.** Livi Gosling. DK Children, 2023. 80 pages.  
A collection of gardening projects for children ages 5-7 for growing vegetables, fruit and flowers in everything from indoor pots to neighborhood lots. It provides step-by-step instructions for getting seeds, planting them, and nurturing their growth. It encourages rewilding, planting for pollinators, reusing, and recycling. Beautiful watercolor illustrations. [Link to Publisher](#)

**The No-Dig Children's Gardening Book: Easy and Fun Family Gardening.** Charles Dowding. Welbeck Children's, 2023. 64 pages.  
The author's no-dig technique is well-suited for children who can't manage heavy digging and who lose heart at the prospect of heavy weeding. Written for ages 7-10, its illustrated step-by-step processes can be carried out by children independently, or by parents and children working together. It shares facts about plants and wildlife, as well as suggestions for observations and discoveries outdoors. [Link to Publisher](#)

***Roots, Shoots, Buckets & Boots: Activities to Do in the Garden.*** Sharon Lovejoy. Workman Publishing Company, 1999. 176 pages.

The author, a children's garden advisor to the American Horticultural Society, presents 12 ideas for theme gardens that children and parents can grow together, such as a Pizza Patch, a Flowery Maze, a Moon Garden of night-blooming flowers, and Nature's Medicine Chest. Each idea comes with a garden plan and step-by-step directions for growing seeds and seedlings. One chapter covers gardening basics, with suggestions for easy planting and maintenance. The book includes Discovery Walks for each theme to learn how gardens work, and a list of 20 plants that are guaranteed to turn children into gardeners. Illustrated with the author's watercolors. [Link to Publisher](#)

***The Urban Garden: How One Community Turned Idle Land into a Garden City and How You Can, Too.*** Jeremy N. Smith. Skyhorse Publishing, 2014. 240 pages.

This handbook for urban farming presents fifteen first-person stories by farmers, community garden members, a low-income senior, a troubled teen, a foodie, and a food bank officer, plus a class of first graders, who tell how local food, farms and gardens changed their lives and their community. The book includes seven "How It Works" sections on student farms, community gardens, community-supported agriculture, community education, farm work therapy, and community outreach. [Link to Publisher](#)

***We Garden Together! Projects for Kids: Learn, Grow, and Connect with Nature.*** Jane Hirschi and the Educators at City Sprouts. Storey Publishing, 2023. 48 pages.

This colorful book is filled with step-by-step directions and photos of 3-6 year olds doing gardening activities in yards, classrooms and community gardens. The authors work with City Sprouts, an educational organization that promotes urban gardening and equitable access to nature. The book includes discovery prompts for exploring nature in the garden. [Link to Publisher](#)

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*This list was curated and developed by Illène Pevec, researcher and educator who develops youth gardens at schools and community centers with a current focus on planting trees at schools, and Louise Chawla, professor emerita with the University of Colorado Boulder and member of the Children & Nature Network's Scientific Advisory Council.*

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*This reading list is just one of the resources included in an online toolkit titled **Gardening with Children and Teens**. Find the [full toolkit here](#), in the Children & Nature Network resource hub.*