

Toddler Friendly Gardens

10 Perfect Plants For Children

Non-toxic plants that appeal to the senses are ideal for toddlers. Try some of the following:

- 🌱 Sunflower (*Helianthus*)
- 🌱 Pot marigold (*Calendula*)
- 🌱 African sundew (*Drosera capensis*)
- 🌱 Silver sage (*Salvia argentea*)
- 🌱 Heuchera (Chocolate ruffles)
- 🌱 Love-in-a-mist (*Nigella*)
- 🌱 Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*)
- 🌱 Wild strawberry (*Fragaria vesca*)
- 🌱 Chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*)
- 🌱 Spearmint (*Mentha spicata*)

Your toddler will love the freedom of playing outside – especially as it doesn't matter how messy he gets! Being outdoors is great for you and your child and encourages creativity and independence, as well as helping your little one to develop patience and responsibility. It's altogether much better for his long-term health than endless hours spent sitting in front of the TV.

However, what might have been your ideal garden before you had children will almost certainly not fit the bill once your toddler is on the move, but this need not mean that you have to uproot your precious shrubs and give over your carefully tended lawn to a garish assortment of swings, slides and climbing frames. A truly family-friendly garden brings peace of mind while you're all outside enjoying the sunshine (or rain), but there are a few essentials you need to consider.

Keep a Watchful Eye

Your supervision is important at all times, but that doesn't mean that you need to be constantly at your toddler's side. It's often easy to put play areas (such as sand pits) next to the kitchen window or just outside the back door, so that you can keep an eye on things while you're washing up or getting the tea ready. Put a bench or a garden seat near his play area, too, so you can sit outside and watch him. Make a habit of taking a picnic lunch out to the garden, and

invite little friends (or failing that, his toys) on sunny afternoons – he'll love the adventure of a change of routine, however simple the food or familiar the company.

Make your Garden Low – Maintenance

Extend your lawn – Grass is the ultimate low-maintenance plant, it doesn't need much more than regular mowing. It also makes a great play surface, being much more forgiving than hard surfaces such as stone or concrete, and if you choose a hardy, resilient strain with a fair amount of rye in it, it will take a toddler's knocks without permanent damage.

Plant flowerbeds with hardy shrubs – Ground-cover plants, such as *Stachys byzantina* (lambs ears) and *Heuchera* (chocolate ruffles), have plenty of tactile, as well as visual interest, and pretty hardy perennials, such as geraniums, forget-me-nots and campanulas are perfect small blooms to pick and arrange in tiny vases and they all but look after themselves with lower maintenance needs than time-consuming annuals and biennials.

Opt for Mediterranean plant varieties – These flowers and shrubs can often thrive in a sunny position on very little water. Avoid container plants which, as well as presenting potential trip hazards fail to thrive if you forget to water them.

Get your Toddler Involved

Gardening can open up a whole new world for your toddler. Plants that are fast-growing and tough encourage children to learn about sowing, growing, watering and harvesting, introducing ideas of how the seasons change and the way that nature reproduces itself. If you have the space, a tunnel of inter-twined willow can be a fantastic project and your child can enjoy playing in it. In smaller gardens, put cane 'wig wams' in the earth for runner beans.

The garden is a fabulous place for your toddler to start discovering the wonders of wildlife, too. Bugs, mini-beasts and snails are fascinating to tiny eyes – encourage them into your garden by planting a wildflower area.

Safety First

Sadly, every year more than 125,000 children across the country need hospital treatment for garden injuries and in most cases those injuries could quite easily have been avoided. Some garden safety measures such as filling in a dangerous pond or keeping pesticides and weed killers safely out of reach, this may seem obvious, but you may not have thought of others. Here are a few ways to make your garden safer.

Beware of water – It is one of the biggest attractions and dangers to your children. Fill in (or cover with a rigid mesh) ponds and pools while your children are small and empty paddling pools as soon as you've finished using them.

Lock away sharp tools and electrical items – Never let your child play in the shed.

Site barbecues well away from wooden sheds and fences – Never leave them unattended especially when children are around. They give off carbon monoxide so never light one indoors or in your garage.

Keep paths and steps uncluttered – Ensure they're clean and maintained. Never put swings or climbing frames on hard surfaces or near glass greenhouses. They must be securely fixed and well maintained.

Make sure fences and gates are secure – Ensure the boundaries of your garden are secure.

Check play equipment regularly – Check for a CE or GS mark when buying play equipment. The mark for quality and be wary of buying second hand. Fix them securely following the instructions and check the fixings regularly to make sure they're safe.

Be animal aware – Keep an eye on children when they're playing with animals. Check regularly animal faeces on lawns and in beds and keep sand pits covered when not in use – (cats especially like to pee in them). **REMEMBER to get someone else to do the dirty work when pregnant as animal faeces carries toxoplasmosis, which could harm your baby.**