

### Nurturing The FUTURE

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Here's a sobering statistic: more than one-third of U.S. children and adolescents are considered overweight or obese, according to the Centers for Disease Control. That statistic, the most recent available, is from four years ago.

What are the factors in childhood obesity? Lack of proper nutrition and lack of activity. Now think about the benefits of gardening: physical activity outdoors, increased knowledge about nature and where healthy food comes from, and a greater likelihood to eat what they grow.

Those in the green industry have a unique opportunity to make a positive impact on future generations. Now is the perfect time for garden centers to focus on children, not only to encourage a lifelong love of gardening, but to encourage outdoor activity and better nutrition. First Lady Michelle Obama has championed the cause of growing your own vegetables and school gardening programs are cropping up all over the country as part of the curriculum.

So what can a garden center do to work with schools and local parents to nurture young gardeners? We've provided a few resources to get started, as well as some new products spotted at recent industry trade shows to get the kiddos off on the right foot in the garden and for outdoor activities.

#### Keep It Simple

The National Gardening Association (NGA) included a couple of questions about gardener's attitudes toward kids gardening in its 2009 survey. Essentially, out of the 2,500 respondents, about 13% felt gardening helps kids do better in school, but 12% said they didn't have the space for kids gardening and 9% said they didn't have the time.

The bottom line is unless the adult is an avid gardener, it's less likely kids will be involved in gardening. So how do you capture that weekend warrior coming in for a boost of color, the 4-step program or weed killer? You've got to make kids gardening colorful (to attract any kids that are with the adult) and easy.



1. There are kid-centric prepackaged programs out there to encourage small gardens or even container gardens that don't take up space and just take minutes to set up. Among those options is the **Growums** line ([growums.com](http://growums.com)), which also features an online component filled with fun cartoon characters like Belle Peppa, Brok Lee, Duke the Cuke and many more. This line is also in the big box stores, but is the only one out there with an online aspect, which appeals to high-tech kids today.
2. Another option is products from **Garden in the Koop** ([inthekoop.com](http://inthekoop.com)). This company out of Hillsborough, North Carolina, has several garden kits packaged in biodegradable egg cartons with heirloom seeds. Kits include the Giggling Garden, the Mushroom Garden, the Herb Garden and Save the Bees. The company also offers individual seed packs with fun names like Red Dragon Carrot, Dinosaur Kale and Rattlesnake Pole Bean (all real heirloom seed names!).
3. Batson's Foliage Group also introduced a new line of assorted 2-in. mini-plants called **Ittie Bitties** ([batsononline.com](http://batsononline.com)). The mix includes 8 to 11 varieties that are good for terrariums, fairy gardens or small plantings (all great kids project ideas). The company also offers several mixes, including Ittie Bittie Foliage, Ittie Bittie Ferns and Ittie Bittie Succulents.
4. Fairy gardening is a great introduction to non-edible gardening for children. There are multiple lines of fairy gardening products, including a partnership between **Fairy Gardening Kits** creators Jeff and Emily Sorenson, Gulley Greenhouses of Fort Collins, Colorado, and Henry F. Michell Co. Michell's will sell a line of pre-finished branded mini-plants called Fairy Flowers ([fairygardening.com](http://fairygardening.com)), which will be started by Gulley Greenhouses.



### Tools of the Trade

5. Esschert Designs USA ([esschertdesignsusa.com](http://esschertdesignsusa.com)) offers a full line of tools for children called **Kids In The Garden**, which includes everything from hand tools and aprons to rakes, hoes, watering cans and insect study boxes. The company also offers a bright yellow display rack that sets off the green packaging well.

6. Dramm ([dramm.com](http://dramm.com)) has come out with styles that are perfect for smaller hands. **The Sunrise Rain Wand** is more lightweight than the traditional watering wands and has an easier on and off valve. However, the new **One Touch Rain Wand** for adults has an easy toggle that kids could likely use, as well (Editor's note: My 5-year-old had no trouble holding it and turning it on and off). The Sunrise and the One Touch come in the traditional fun Dramm colors that kids love.

7. An additional option for tools is the **Pinebush Jr.** collection from Pinebush Home & Garden ([pbhomegarden.com](http://pbhomegarden.com)), a Canadian manufacturer and distributor of birding and garden products. The colorful line for children includes trowels, watering cans, rakes, shovels, brooms, tote bags and more. The bumblebee set features a trowel, fork and kneeling pad in the shape of a bumblebee.

8. Melissa & Doug, a trusted name among toys for kids, has an outdoor-themed line called the **Sunny Patch Outdoor Lifestyle line**. The gardening part of the line includes hand tools, gardening bag, watering can, toy lawn mower and trucks. The rest of the line includes outdoor activity-inducers like tents, picnic sets, pools and more that can be cross-merchandised with the garden toys.

### Find Out More

There are lots of opportunities for garden centers to attract kids—from fairy gardening events to basic planting parties, hosting birthday parties, veggie gardening for kids and more. There are retailers, too, who are active in providing tours for local schools and educating kids on where their plants come from. For more information about school gardens and activities involving kids gardening, visit the NGA's website [KidsGardening.org](http://KidsGardening.org). There's a wealth of information on there, including how-tos, activity ideas and more information on the school gardening explosion. **GP**