

# How gardens mirror our lives

## Want to relive your youth?

Many of the things that we would love to enjoy in our youth only tend to happen once we reach a certain age: a big house, money, experience and time for ourselves. Increasingly these factors are preventing young people from considering starting a family. It seems that having children is synonymous of yet another restriction on your personal life. On the other hand, being able to watch them grow up and listening to their laughter gives a deeper meaning to life, and they bring about many joys which money cannot buy. State and communal support are of great help to young families, and allotment gardens are but a small contribution which allow them to extend their home, leisure activities and relaxation.

## Help, I've got a garden!

We do not learn at school how to create a garden in which we can feel at home. A large part of the new generation of parents were raised in cities, often far from any green areas, and only experienced nature on school trips, holidays on the farm or by visiting grandparents in the countryside. A barren area, 300 metres square, located next to a skilled allotment gardener's pretty garden, together with the Association's ten pages of regulations, can easily be discouraging.

You cannot learn how to become a gardener in one day, and a garden's development is like your life: just as humans adapt to new situations and changes in life, the garden also goes through permanent changes as its occupants mould it to suit their specific needs.

## The basic principles for creating an allotment garden

### A lawn for relaxation and play

In addition to a small garden shed and somewhere to sit outside, a family with small children needs space to relax and particularly to play and enjoy themselves without restraints. A hardy and fairly large lawn is perfect. Quality "Grass for play areas" seeds as well as fertilizer and regular mowing ensure a firm lawn where they can spread out a cover and play together. Flowering grass is not ideal as it can only be mowed twice a year. However, those who want flowers can plant daffodils and crocuses of any colour at the far end of the lawn in Autumn. The flowers will blossom in early Spring when the lawn is not yet in use, and the dead leaves can be cut once they have wilted by the end of May. Afterwards, the whole lawn can be used again.

### Avoiding the dangers

The garden should not include dangerous places such as ponds and so forth, as you cannot always guarantee a child's supervision, and small children can easily drown in the shallowest puddle of water. The main play area for small children should be within view of parents. The leaves, flowers and fruits of numerous plants contain substances, which can cause stomach upsets, sickness or even serious poisoning. A list of these plants is available from the Administration and should be taken into account when choosing plants for schools, children's gardens and play areas. It is important to take this point into consideration when creating a public open space where children may be unsupervised. Precautions in the choice of plants is also recommended in private gardens, although you should also have confidence in children when warning them of the dangers. Not all children will try to eat every plant and even if they do, it is uncommon that the amount

eaten is enough to cause illness. Nevertheless, it is not advisable to grow certain plants, such as snowdrops or laburnum when small children play in the garden.

### **A garden full of discoveries**

A vegetable patch with berries, vegetables and aromatic herbs, which allow both children and adults to discover new things, form an essential part of a true garden. To teach children to respect it as something special, you can surround it with a low hedge of boxwood, lavender and annual plants (such as French marigolds) or with a low fence of rushes. Any plant which grows easily and only needs a bit of water and monitoring can be grown here. You can also grow winter vegetables such as pumpkins and courgettes, or strawberries, raspberries, herbs, garden peas and beans. The latter can look especially attractive if you use flexible rushes or bamboo to make an Indian wigwam. To make one, first draw out a circle of approximately one metre diameter on the ground. Place the branches in the ground at equal distances apart around the circle, then bind them at the top. After the end of May, plant three bean seeds at the bottom of each branch, preferably red kidney beans which flower until Autumn with a vivid red colour. To give the structure a more colourful appearance until the beans grow, you can tie coloured bands around it. And by leaving an opening on one side, it can also serve as a place to play. Paths filled with tree bark each year can also be put to use in this garden of discovery, allowing easy access for monitoring and watering plants.

### **Enjoy with all five senses**

Gardening is very sensual, be it the scent of the flowers, the buzzing of insects or the taste of aromatic herbs. This sensual part of the garden should be located in the sunniest area. A mound of earth between thirty and fifty centimetres should work well and is easily supported by a small dry stone wall. It is important to choose a location which is accessible from every side. A wall coated in concrete, for example, is a warm place from which to look at the garden. The stones are available quite cheaply from stockists of construction materials, who obtain them as "leftover stone". Next to concrete slabs which serve as seats, you can plant ground covering herbs like lavender, thyme, rosemary or mint then, following the shape of the garden, larger plants of different colours such as buddleia. To stop the garden from extending too far, you can plant a border of phacelias, French marigolds, poppies and daisies which will leave no room for weeds. If the buddleia is too thick, you can cut off a part of the plant and put it on a compost heap. These plants attract insects like a magnet, particularly butterflies, which in turn attract children. The seemingly "wild fire" growth gives the impression of being in a magical land. The chance to put into place various creative ideas in the allotment garden, step by step, and to discover new things as a family or with friends can be the start of a new lease of life. "What are you doing next weekend?" "I'm going to see Alice in Wonderland, just over there, right in the middle of an allotment garden site."

Marianne Geneger-Hein  
The Rhénanie Association of Allotment Gardens



To garden cannot be learned in one day, but the person who wishes to become an expert, starts practicing as early as possible.



A resistant lawn offers much place to play and to let off steam



Attention while choosing plants:  
In a garden destined to children one is well advised not to plant lilies of the valley



Children give much joy to live, a happiness that cannot be paid with money



To garden is a sensual pleasure: the smell of the plants is part of it

*Sub-titles of the pictures concerning the article:  
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from M. Genenger-Hein*

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