



Do Snails Eat Lunch?

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This is the most recent question my five year-old asked me over lunch. We had been discussing why some of the patio tomatoes had big bites out of their leaves: the brown garden snail is the most common snail causing problems in California gardens. Since snails are nocturnal, she wanted to know things like when do they get up, when do they go to bed, and of course, when do they eat lunch?

I have fond memories of gardening when I was younger, something most adult gardeners have in common. I would love to continue to cultivate (pun intended!) this interest in my daughter so that she develops a lifelong appreciation, respect, and enjoyment of nature. Not only does gardening offer tangible benefits like exercise and growing healthy food, but it also builds communication skills, strong relationships, and teaches children how to work toward a common goal. What, you may ask, can you do to share your love of gardening with the children in your life? Here are some great ideas and tips to get you started:

First and foremost, show them your love of gardening! And surround them with anything resembling a garden: containers, herbs, small beds or raised beds, trees, flowers, etc. Take advantage of any opportunity to create great garden experiences with your children because these experiences become happy memories.

Second, remember that adults and children have different priorities. Relax your standards a bit! And be prepared to do most of the maintenance in the garden. Let your children decide what to plant and give them room to dig. Better yet, help them plan, plant, and care for a garden of their own! There is a powerful lesson and pride in knowing “I did it myself” and they will exercise their creative muscles as well as their physical ones.

Next, when deciding what to plant, remember that children are drawn to extremes. Big flowers (like sunflowers), small vegetables (munch cucumbers), and bright colors (purple carrots!) catch their interest and curiosity. Some plants like mimosa pudica sensitive ferns and snap dragons are “performing plants;” the former closes when touched and you can make the latter’s flowers look

like they are talking! Try textured plants, like fuzzy woolly thyme and prickly strawflowers, for something they cannot resist touching and fragrant plants, such as roses, lilacs, lavender, and mint, for exciting their imagination. Children also love butterflies, which are drawn to common herbs like parsley and dill, as well as native plants like milkweed, California lilacs, and grey musk sage. Flowers that are pickable are a plus, too; maybe even the moon flower, which only blooms at night!



Finally, visit your garden daily and check the plants together. Munch on some green beans and let them ask questions. While you are talking, pull weeds here and there and look for bugs. Explain what makes an insect good for the garden, and if it is not good to have in the garden, then talk about what makes it interesting. Working together creates a sense of ownership; when children feel like the garden is theirs, they will also feel heightened interest and responsibility for caring for it. Harvesting together is another prime opportunity to teach children when fruits are ripe and how to care for them after they are

picked. Cooking with fresh food and cooking it together demonstrates that healthy eating is fun and tasty too!

Before we finished lunch, my five year-old suddenly looked stricken. “Do snails eat roses too?” She was very concerned because she loves the English roses growing around the patio. She promptly checked them and noticed, with noisy disgust, that they were covered with “bugs.” The roses were infested with aphids and we spent several days consistently spraying them off with the hose. Every morning she announces her intention to go and check the roses for aphids and sure enough, she will find a few for us to politely displace. I have created a dirt-digging, mint-munching, aphid-hunting gardener! Mission accomplished.

Join Master Gardeners this Saturday, June 7th, for their free class: Busting the Myths About Garden Remedies: Which Miracle Remedies Really Do Work and Why? This class provides scientific information about what remedies work and don't work in the home garden. Does B-1 really work -- what about egg shells planted with each tomato plant -- which deer repellents really work -- can you really use beer in the garden? Come and learn amazing answers to these, and many more, gardening questions. Class is from 9:00 a.m. to noon at the Government Center Hearing Room, Building C, 2850 Fairlane Court, Placerville.

Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions at local farmers markets and in their office at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville from Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon. Walk-ins are welcome, or call [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at http://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.