

# Thoughts on how to raise a kid who loves the Earth

Close your eyes and think back to a happy time and place in your childhood. What do you see? What do you hear? What do you smell? What do you feel? What are you touching? What can you taste?

For most of us, these memories involve nature and our families.

My love of the outdoors began in my backyard, digging in the dirt with spoons, making mulberry mud pies, inspecting roly-pollys and worms under rocks, catching bumblebees in baby food jars during the day and lightning bugs in the evening.

Love of the earth came by discovering the first pussy willow to bloom in the side yard, spotting the first hyacinth emerging from the cold flowerbed, helping cut a few branches of forsythia to force into bloom in the living room while the wind blew polar. Picking a plum warmed in the sun, the sweet juice dribbling down my chin. Spotting cocoons on milkweed plants in the field near my home.

There was so much life to explore in our backyard. Our block was the world, each yard being a new country to discover.

Today our children's time seems programmed with events that



disconnect them from the natural discovery and exploration of living things.

It only takes a bit of earth.

Give your child time to play in the yard. Have one area that doesn't have to be pristine and is available for digging and looking under rocks.

Working in your yard seems a lot like playing in the yard to your child. Child-sized rakes, shovels, hoes, trowels, and gardening gloves are readily available in home improvement or gardening stores. Safety al-

ways comes first so make sure you have a place to store tools and give lessons on how to use them safely. Remember, no running with tools! A three-year-old loves to rake grass and leaves into a circle made by a hula-hoop, which defines where to deposit raked leaves.

Introduce one tool at a time. Helping keep a clean yard is a first step for our children to learn to keep a clean Earth. Ecology? The word comes from the Greek word, oikos, for house. Ecology begins at home.

Grow something. It doesn't take acreage to grow plants. Start a potato in a jar of water on your kitchen cabinet. Sprout an avocado seed. Make alfalfa or bean sprouts. Plant cherry tomatoes in a pot on your porch. Let your children polish the leaves of a rubber tree plant. My favorite book to inspire gardening with children is *Roots, Shoots, Buckets, and Boots: Gardening Together* by Sharon Lovejoy.

Walk every day. Walk in your



**Maren Schmidt**

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yard. Walk in your neighborhood or nearby parks. Work up to take longer hikes at state parks or preserves. Remember to take water, snacks, sunscreen and insect repellent. As you walk do a scavenger type hunt for three types of plants or animals. For example: a black oak, a sycamore, a blackberry vine, a bluebird, a monarch butterfly, a worm.

Enjoy the weather. Get out in the rain. Of course, there is always the danger of thunderstorms and lightning, but a warm summer rain invites the senses. To walk in the rain, without a raincoat, galoshes, or umbrella, is a wonderful experience for a child. Ask — does the air smell different when it is raining? What does the rain sound like? How does mud feel between your toes?

Have towels and dry clothes ready for your return from a walk in the rain. Let yourself be a kid again.

Learning to love the earth begins early. It begins in our backyards as we play, work, walk, discover, explore and enjoy this wonderful world.

*Kids Talk™ is an award-winning column dealing with childhood development issues written by Maren Stark Schmidt, M.Ed. She has more than 25 years experience working with young children and is the author of Understanding Montessori: A Guide for Parents. Contact her via e-mail at maren@kidstalknews.*

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