

The Little Gardener: Helping Children Connect with the Natural World

Julie Cerny

Ysemay Dercon

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Julie A. Cerny's *The Little Gardener* is a friendly, useful resource for parent-child gardening teams.

Arguing that indoor lifestyles take a toll, the book extends a beautiful invitation to go outside and grow something together. It's written with both Big Gardeners and Little Gardeners in mind, sharing just the right amount of details to equip both for success without overwhelming those who are new to gardening.

Their content ideal for elementary-age children, sidebars titled "Just for Little Gardener" distill complex ideas such as finding the right spot for your garden. They communicate notions with respect, conveying confidence that children can contribute to projects. Journaling ideas within each chapter—such as to plan out what to plant and when, and to outline whom will do what tasks—will help both generations plan and reflect.

The idea of working on a project together with a child can be daunting, but the book breaks down its tasks, like determining the ideal soil types for specific plants, with insights to make parents better teachers and partners for their children. Ideas on guiding children through their questions and listening, rather than doing all the planning, are shared.

As the book moves from dreaming of the ideal garden to designing, planting, and harvesting from it, it shares practical tips for mapping a space, developing a planting calendar, and making checklists. It also conveys intangible benefits, like helping children appreciate nature, teaching them to eat healthily, and fostering care for the natural world. Illustrator Ysemay Dercon's warm, inviting illustrations of garden spaces, fruits and vegetables, and parents and children working together are a vital asset, showcasing the beauty of the produce.

The Little Gardener is a how-to guide that invites families to enjoy and care for the natural world.

MELISSA WUSKE (March / April 2020)

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