

## ■ Learning Through Play

# From Seeds to Sprouts

If you're looking for an inexpensive, creative way to provide valuable learning experiences for your child, look no further than a houseplant. A fragile seed springing up into a sprout from its soil bed is a magical sight for a child.

You'll find that planting with your child yields not only a good learning experience but good feelings as well. After all, it is a special experience when you cooperate to bring seeds, soil, water, and sun together and begin to nurture new life. These tips will help you and your child get started on some very satisfying planting and sprouting adventures!



Let your child *gently* press a few herb seeds in each shell. (You can label the inside lid of the carton to identify each herb.) When the seeds have sprouted their second set of leaves, transfer each shell to its own pot or to the garden, cracking the shells lightly so the roots can travel outside of the shell.

### ■ Try alfalfa seeds for quick results.

Alfalfa sprouts are especially easy to take care of and yield fast results. Simply put a tablespoon of seeds in a jar and cover the top with cheesecloth. Two or three times a day, pour fresh water into the jar to wet the seeds, and then pour it out. The seeds should sprout in about three to four days, so your child can plant them on Tuesday and harvest them for your family's dinner salad on Friday!

## ■ Activities to Grow On

A variety of objects make good planters. Empty milk cartons perform better than plastic or stoneware because they allow more oxygen to reach the plant. Hollow eggshells and clay pots also work well.

■ **Select and plant different seeds and bulbs.** Try citrus seeds; they usually take two to four weeks to sprout. Ask the whole family to toss a few seeds from the fruits they eat into a "growing pot," and water them twice a week. Fruits and vegetables are also great to plant because children can harvest them later. Check the back of seed packages for sprouting times.

Try planting an amaryllis bulb. This flower will start sprouting within days of planting and should be watered about three times a week. (Remember that many bulbs are poisonous if ingested, so make sure your child doesn't try any "taste testing.")

■ **Plant an eggshell garden of herbs.** How about growing your own thyme, basil, oregano, or other herbs? They take six to eight weeks to sprout, but what fun for your child to grow some of the ingredients you cook with! Break extra-large eggs in half (save yolks and whites) and rinse the shells. Have your child carefully fill each half-shell with soil. Then *you* use a safety pin to make a small drainage hole in the bottom of each shell. Ask your child to put these tiny pots back in the egg carton.

■ **Watch roots grow.** An avocado pit will allow your child to see a plant's roots as they grow because the pit can be started in water. Stick toothpicks in the pit and suspend the bottom half in a jar of water. Rooting takes two to three weeks, after which the avocado should be transferred to a pot filled with soil. Water it three times a week. Sprouting will begin within two weeks of the transfer. The same applies for a potato or a carrot head (about an inch of carrot). With a carrot, be sure to clean off the wax before you begin.

## ■ After You Plant

Children tend to be impatient with an activity that requires a good deal of time to get results. After a while the urge to dig into the soil to see what is happening may become irresistible. Help dissuade this urge by overseeing the plant's growth in a fostering, nonforceful manner. Looking at a book that shows plant parts may also help your child imagine what his or her plant looks like beneath the soil. Watch that your child doesn't overwater or push the seed too far into the soil.

After planting, your child may enjoy drawing a picture label for the sprout. Help him or her write the plant name on the label after the picture is drawn. Then glue the label to a toothpick and stick it in the soil.