

## Planning a Garden for Family Fun

How do you create a garden that children enjoy playing in without spending lots of money? The secret is to plan a lovely environment for everyone, while taking into account the adjustments that will be called for because of the changing interests and abilities of your children.

A lovely garden environment includes a sense of privacy, a sitting area, some lush growth, shade and sun, colour in foliage, flowers and made objects, birds and butterflies, and a combination of open spaces and enclosed spaces. A family friendly garden omits poisonous plants and prickly plants along pathways while children are young. All aspects need a regular check for safety. Always err on the stronger side for any structures or equipment and set up some garden rules together so that accidents are less likely to happen. Children usually come up with appropriate rules if they are consulted before there is a problem. An example would be a discussion of how to keep the windows safe when play commences with the new cricket set.

The aim is to ensure that children learn to enjoy time in the garden; ideally they will select outdoor time because that is where they can relax, spend time with others, have fun and be challenged. This will happen if you, the important adults in their lives, suggest, model and enjoy activities in the garden with them. The ideas listed here are quite general. You, and the children in your life, will certainly have your own suggestions and particular interests to guide you, but here are some pointers to get you started.

**Babies enjoy:** soft surfaces to lie and crawl on; trees to look up at; flowers and patterns to look at; textures to touch; perfumes to smell; bird calls to hear; movement to catch the attention; pets and people to interact with; a bowl of water to splash in; easy and constant supervision (which means comfortable conditions for adults); and security.



**Pre-schoolers enjoy:** mysterious places to hide in and explore; places to dig and build in such as a sand pit or dirt area; helping with vegie and flower gardening; places to climb and stretch and develop strength and coordination; swings, cubbies and hammocks; places to have picnics; places to rest in and be quiet; open spaces for ball games; surfaces that allow for ride-on toys and small bikes and bouncing balls; trampolines; running and chasing games; pets to help care for; people to interact with; storage for toys; paddle pools; water dish with containers and sieves; stepping stone path or different level stumps to jump across; regular supervision; security.



**Primary school children enjoy:** mysterious places to have private spots; materials and spaces to create own cubbies; running and chasing games; larger sand pits and dirt pits that allow for activities that take planning and days to accomplish; strong swings that allow for unexpected use; monkey bars, hanging ropes and tyres to swing on; larger areas for ball games and bike riding; some hard paving for marking out games such as down ball and drawing with chalk; camping; hammocks; seats and tables for playing cards and games, relaxing, reading and eating; trampolines; basketball or netball ring or rebound wall with enough space around it; helping with all aspects of gardening and having a personal spot to plan, plant and care for; supervised camp fires and bonfires; pets to care for; people to interact with; occasional checking and supervision; security.

**Secondary children enjoy:** areas for practising sporting and dance skills; a storage area for bikes and other equipment; areas for eating, relaxing and casual socialising; inclusion in planning and occasional assistance with family gardening projects; a personal area for gardening if motivated; a range of areas so that teenagers are able to use the garden for some private relaxation, reading, playing cards, chatting and romancing; an area for low key games like Frisbee and French cricket; natural environment for making videos and doing photo shoots; trampolines; being responsible for pets; camping; camp fires and cooking; family bonfires; people to interact with; using machinery responsibly; an area where they can be doing something while keeping an eye out for friends passing by; minimal supervision.

Can you see how a sandpit area might later become a basketball ring and paved area, how piles of materials and a place to make cubbies might give way to an extra, lightly screened seating area? The 'lovely garden environment' - trees, open and enclosed spaces, an outdoor seating area and attractive plantings - is essential at every stage.

Happy Gardening,  
Christine Windle,  
Garden Gate of Inverleigh Nursery, 0403 267 286, [www.gardengatenursery.com.au](http://www.gardengatenursery.com.au)