

## Children at Berridale

We are happy to have families on our site. Bringing your children or grandchildren to the plot is a great way of helping them to understand how food is produced, allows them to spend time outdoors and they can get some healthy exercise. Few children are able to free-range in our risk averse society but an allotment can offer them some of the freedom and experiences that previous generations enjoyed. However there are particular dangers on our site that cannot be ignored – more about this later.

- *Healthy eating* - Children who have planted seeds and watch a crop develop are much more likely to eat vegetables routinely and establish healthy eating habits that will last into adulthood. Radishes and carrots pulled from the ground, washed and eaten immediately are delicious and nothing beats a freshly picked sweetcorn cob; they can even be eaten raw. As for cherry tomatoes, raspberries and strawberries – you'll be lucky if they make it home!
- *Contact with Nature* - Research has confirmed that children who have regular contact with the natural environment do better at school and have an increased ability to deal with life events. They are also likely to retain an appreciation of, and concern for, the environment as adults.
- *Learning* - Weeding together or picking produce can give you the opportunity to have a relaxed chat with your child; children will often open up when the focus is on something other than them. Be prepared to garden in short bursts with young children and make a game out of the task in hand. Find out what they like doing but don't raise your hopes – even if they like digging, they'll probably only enjoy digging holes. You could try burying a few surprises beforehand and turn digging into a Treasure Hunt. If you're lucky they may do the watering. They may prefer working alone, as far from you as possible. Letting them weed unsupervised isn't a good idea though unless you're prepared to have some of your carefully nurtured crops dug up!  
They can experience the different smells, tastes and textures of plants, witness the cycle of the seasons, measure the growth of seedlings, count the number of caterpillars and weigh the strawberry crop. Your child may be more interested in making mud pies, collecting worms, digging pointless holes or building a pile of stones but these are valuable childhood pastimes and only to be encouraged. Older children may be reluctant to leave their phone or tablet to venture outdoors but why not exploit their IT skills and enlist them to help plan your plot and growing schedule, using one of the many apps available. Helping to bring their creation to life and the prospect of eating some of the produce may entice them to the plot.
- *An Area of Their Own* - Providing children with a small area of the plot that they can look after will encourage them to feel independent and plan for themselves. Raised beds make an area easier to manage and smaller children may appreciate child sized tools.
- *Try to always have some fast growing crops* – radish for example – and some things that can be eaten straight away. Things that grow fast and are big (sunflowers, gourds) are popular. Planting seedlings rather than seeds reduces the waiting time. A herb garden works for some children.
- *Being Sociable* - Talking to fellow plot-holders is a great way for your children to socialise and learn but many people come to the plots for a bit of peace and quiet, so do be sensitive to their needs. Other plots may also present dangers outwith your control, such as broken glass or tools, materials left lying around or unlocked sheds with chemicals that children can get their hands on. Please ensure that any children you bring on to our

site respect plot boundaries and understand that, for their safety and to avoid unintentional damage to other member's plots, they cannot be on another member's plot without that member's consent. The Allotments may seem like a great playground to a child, however children may trample on growing areas or otherwise inadvertently damage other member's crops. Equally, children running around on any paths in proximity to the many greenhouses and frames on our land is a potentially serious accident waiting to happen. Please teach your children to stay on the main paths and not to enter another plot without the Plotholder's permission. Our Constitution & Rules make it clear that every plotholder is responsible for the conduct of any non-member, including children, they allow on to Association land, as well as setting out the possible consequences if issues persist.

- *Staying Safe* - The simplest way of protecting your children is to ensure that you have assessed and reduced risks on your own plot.
  - ✓ Have you capped all bamboo canes which are sticking out of the ground?
  - ✓ Are any chemicals and seeds stored in appropriate child-proof containers out of small children's reach?
  - ✓ Have you ensured that any water on your plot is safely covered?
  - ✓ Are sharp tools stored out of the way?
  - ✓ Have you cleared the plot of any debris which may have been left by previous plotholders?
  - ✓ Are tetanus injections up to date?

Many seeds, bulbs and leaves such as rhubarb leaves, are poisonous to eat, so always supervise younger children and inform more independent children. Berridale is quite exposed with no high trees or buildings to break the wind, and over the years many greenhouses at Berridale have been damaged or destroyed in storms and it isn't unusual to find small shards of glass in the soil. Cuts and grazes will happen and insects will bite so it is a good idea to keep a basic first aid kit of antiseptic wipes, plasters and anti-histamine cream at the ready; not forgetting the sun protection cream for delicate skins. Remember to always wash children's hands before they eat on the plot, the odd bit of garden soil may not harm them but soil may have been exposed to manure that could contain E.Coli bacteria, which can survive for up to six months in the ground.

- *Losing Interest*- It's a sad fact that children grow up! Sooner or later it will happen – the plot won't be considered "cool", or the soil will play havoc with their hair. Allotments don't feature among the current "must haves" for youngsters. There's little point in putting any pressure on at that point. Hopefully your own interest won't diminish and with any luck they'll regain interest as they grow up and remember the fun they had sowing, planting and eating when they were young.