



Young buds

Growing green thumbs can start early, so encourage children to get in touch with Mother Nature

>> Words and photography Tony Fawcett

Like plants, young gardeners need to be nurtured. Treat them to a little early nurturing and they are likely to benefit from a fabulous recreation for the rest of their lives. As well, you might coax them outside and away from the dreaded TV and computer games.

Maria Ciavarella knows all about this. For apart from being a mother of three young children herself, the former teacher spends much of her time introducing young children to the joys of gardening.

"Children have a natural curiosity about growing things that we need to foster," says Maria who operates a young gardener program for the Bulleen Art & Garden nursery.

"What we're doing at the nursery is showing parents a fun way to have children involved in gardening without going to a whole lot of expense."

Maria believes the softly-softly approach is best, maybe building a scarecrow, painting pebbles or planting flowers or vegetables so children can watch them grow.

Good vegetable crops to grow, ones that demand minimal input and increase quickly in size, include radish, cherry tomatoes and Lebanese cucumbers, and punnets of flowering annuals are inevitably popular.

Even a 1 sqm plot is enough to satisfy most young gardeners. If that is not possible, consider a mini garden in a polystyrene fruit box filled with potting mix.

"You can make it fun with pebbles and pathways, marking sticks, lots of painted products, things you can eat," she says.

"Such gardens are fun and teach children responsibility, how putting in the effort will produce rewards in the form of flowers or vegetables."

Another good option is a portable chicken coop that can be moved around the garden. Maria has one at the nursery.

"Chooks are also a great way of bringing a bit of farmyard atmosphere to the garden without too much fuss and bother – as well, you get the eggs.

"If chooks take up too much room, the next best option is worm farming.

"These farms show children the value of recycling kitchen scraps and how you get a valuable by-product, the worm poo, that can be used for

Little helpers

Maria Ciavarella shares her garden knowlege (top)

Garden know-how

Inspire young minds with various gardening aspects (below right)

Pretty as a flower