



SUMMER-FALL-WINTER-SPRING FAMILY PLAY PLANS

Busy families often find it hard to set aside time for play, especially with the distraction of screens and technology.

TRUCE offers some seasonal, screen-free ideas to inspire your whole family—whatever their ages—to play together.



SPRING PLAY IDEAS

Turn off the Screens & Turn on the Gardening

Gardening offers opportunities for family playtime—both indoors and out.

Young children are enchanted by gardening. The process of planting seeds in dirt is fun in itself. Then it's amazing to watch what they've planted grow into colorful flowers or something to eat. As families enjoy gardening together, there are many learning opportunities, from sorting and counting out seeds to observing how plants grow. And, of course, gardening can be just plain fun for everyone.



As you garden together, talk about what you are doing: "I'm making a hole as deep as my finger to put the seed in." "I'm pulling these weeds so there is room for the radishes to grow." Ask questions such as: "Do you know why we need to water the garden?" "How many different kinds of seeds are we planting?" Watch young children as they play in the garden to help you figure out what they're working on, so you know what questions to ask.

IDEAS FOR SPRINGTIME FAMILY PLAY WITH GARDENS

GARDENING SCIENCE

- **Gardening Experiment.** Help children plant identical seeds in two pots. Place one pot near a window. Remind them to water it each day. Place the other pot in a dark place and leave it alone. Ask children to predict what will happen to the two plants. You could expand the experiment by planting seeds in four pots—two near the window and two in the dark, but water only one in each location.
- **Earthworms and Ladybugs.** Together, observe the earthworms and ladybugs that end up making their home in your garden. Use a magnifying glass for a closer look. Talk about how these creatures help your garden.
- **Compost.** In a container with a lid, start a compost. Toss in leftover fruits and veggies, peels, coffee grounds, tea bags, eggshells, etc. Watch what happens. How does it look? Smell? Stir it from time to time. Then, when black and crumbly, add as fertilizer to your garden.



GARDENING AND FOOD

- **Grow and Eat Your Veggies.** Nothing encourages children to eat their veggies more than having planted and harvested them! Radishes, cucumber, and zucchini grow fast. Carrots take longer, but are often favorites of kids. Green bean plants (bush, not pole beans) produce many beans over a long period of time, are easy for young children to pick, and can be enjoyed raw or cooked. Children may like cherry tomatoes better than full-sized tomatoes.
- **Plant a “Pizza” Garden.”** Grow tomatoes, onions, basil, oregano. After harvesting, make pizza using the ingredients that your family grew together.



TRUCE FAMILY PLAY TIP

Develop a family screen turn off ritual. Here are some ideas:

- Count all the screens that are on as you turn them off.
- See if you can turn off all the screens in a minute or less.
- Have a bin or basket where you put all portable screens during family play time.

WHAT DO THE EXPERTS SAY?

Educators recognize that children learn important vocabulary from active play and conversations with members of their families.

GARDENING PROJECTS

- **Quick Results Garden.** To keep the children’s interest in the garden, make sure that there are some quick results. Plant a combination of seeds, seedlings, and full-grown plants. Plant seeds with quick results, such as radishes, morning glories, cucumbers, zinnias, and zucchini. Plant your garden either in pots to be grown indoors or on a porch or front step or outdoors in a small plot. Check out the availability of community gardens in your neighborhood.



- **Indoor “Shoebbox” Garden.** For those without access to a plot of land, your family can still create a garden indoors. Get a plastic bin the size of a large shoe box.

Fill with dirt. Plant seeds, either purchased or from food you eat (apple, cucumber, etc.). Put near a window, water regularly, and see what happens.

- **Fun with Seeds.** Sort seeds by size, shape, or color. Guess what they will grow into when planted. Collect them from food you eat (avocados, oranges, cucumbers, apples, peppers, etc.) Dry the seeds and plant them.



- **Grow a Playhouse.** Plant sunflowers in a circle, leaving a gap for an opening. When grown, it becomes a secret hideout for kids.



- **Halloween Pumpkins.** Harvest pumpkins in time for Halloween! Pumpkins need lots of space, but aren’t hard to grow. Kids can help dig a mound of dirt and then poke holes for the seeds. Watch them change from miniature green pumpkins to big, orange ones that can be carved into Jack-o-Lanterns.

- **Plant a Fairy or Rock Garden.** In a dirt-filled container, arrange rocks and small plants and, perhaps, a frog or fairy to live there.

