

Pointers For Parents

Transform Your Backyard Into A Taco Garden As A Fun Family Activity

(NAPSA)—Many parents across the country are looking for ways to get their children to eat better, get outdoors and be more active. Gardening is a great solution—especially when you grow something kids love like a veggie taco garden.

When growing a garden with children, it's important to make sure the activity is an enjoyable experience or their attention will wander. According to Charlie Nardozzi, chief horticulturist for the National Gardening Association and Chief Gardening Officer consultant for Hilton Garden Inn®, there's no better way to make the garden exciting and meaningful for kids than to grow a familiar food.

Nardozzi knows firsthand how kids of all ages love digging in soil, and the important life lessons learned when planting, nurturing, harvesting and eating what you grow. Throughout the year, Nardozzi leads young students in gardening exercises through his hotel's Grow A School Garden program. Through the community outreach, hotel team members from the United States, Canada and Mexico work with local students to grow vegetables and herbs indoors in "Grow Labs" or outdoors on the school grounds.

"Gardening is a great way to encourage kids to spend time outdoors, learn about where food comes from and how to care for the environment and get some physical activity," says Nardozzi.



Horticulturist Charlie Nardozzi has learned that there's no better way to make a garden exciting for kids than for them to grow a familiar food.

"And it's a great way for families to come together over a common project and reap the rewards with a fun meal."

Nardozzi offers the following tips for growing a veggie taco garden at home or school:

- **Give Kids Appropriate Tasks.** Young toddlers can help plant seeds while older children can choose what to grow, plant the transplants, water plants, decorate the garden and help with the harvest.

- **Grow What Kids Want.** Make sure that each child gets to

pick the vegetable or herb he/she wants to plant. This gives them a feeling of ownership over the activity. Some good vegetables to grow include tomatoes, peppers, lettuce, onions, cilantro and cucumbers.

- **Decorate the Garden.** Let kids have fun decorating the taco garden in their own unique way. They can make a veggie taco garden sign, Popsicle stick plant markers and kid-sized garden tunnels, teepees and banners.

- **Plant in a Pot.** If you don't have room for a garden, consider growing veggies in a container. Choose a large pot—a 20" diameter works best—and arrange the plants so the tallest plants such as tomatoes and peppers are in the center and the low-growing ones such as lettuce and cucumbers are along the edge.

- **Plant Indoors.** If you can't grow plants outdoors, consider setting up grow lights indoors to grow lettuce, Swiss chard, spinach, radishes and scallions.

- **Harvest and Enjoy.** In about two months, kids can harvest the vegetables and herbs. For a fun dinner idea, get the entire family together to enjoy your homegrown veggie tacos.

For more ideas on gardening with children, visit www.kidsgardening.com or www.garden.org and to find out more about the "Grow A School Garden" program, visit www.StayHGI.com.