

Growing Green Kids

By Kathleen M. Reilly, *Better Homes & Gardens* "Healthy You," April 2008

Help kids explore the outdoors, improve the environment, and learn to love nature

Terri Partyka's children love to play in the dirt at their Romeo, Michigan home — and Terri doesn't mind one bit. The kids plant trees, feed wildlife, and even weed the garden by hand. "No herbicides here," says Terri, who is raising her children to understand the impact they can have on their world. Experts say the hands-on approach is the best way to cultivate a love of the outdoors and build a generation more likely to cherish our precious resources. "You have to nurture a sense of wonder about the world, so kids grow to love and care for it," says Tim Grant, co-editor of *Green Teacher* magazine. Activities at home help kids make that connection. Here's how.

5 Ways To Go Greener

1. **Enjoy movie night — naturally** Settle in with a child-friendly nature documentary, says Jane Louise Bourwas, movie critic for *kaboose.com*. Consider the recent video release, *Hoot*, the story of three teens who try to save endangered owls. Other good choices: *March of the Penguins* and IMAX nature movies. Such films help kids develop empathy for the natural world.
2. **Use it up, wear it out** Show kids quick and easy ways to conserve resources. Let them decorate containers — one for paper, plastic and aluminum — for a home recycling station then schedule a weekly trip to the recycling center. Encourage your child to reuse household items to create toys, such as "stilts" from sturdy cans with ropes attached.
3. **Notice the little things** Grant suggests dipping a clear glass jar into a pond. "Get a magnifying glass and look at the incredible array of creatures," he says. "Talk about how one creature is food for the next and let them see how beautiful and complex the natural world around us is." As a follow-up, rent *Microcosms*, a documentary on insects, to tie it all together.
4. **Grow their green thumbs** Help your children grow fascinating plants. Check out DuneCraft growing kits (dunecraft.com) for fantastic plants to get your child fired up about botany — we like the "dinosaur plant" that can live for 50 years without light or water, and the "sensory dome" with plants to tickle all five senses. This gives kids a greater appreciation for flora at home or when traveling.
5. **Bake a cake** Baking is a celebratory thing, so bake a "one world cake" as a celebration of the world. Use many ingredients — chocolate, Brazil nuts, raisins — and discuss with your children where each comes from. Point out growing regions on a world map so kids can begin to understand the importance of protecting ecologically delicate areas.

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