

Project Pizza Garden

A fun activity for the family, with delicious results.

by Krista Campbell

Did someone say pizza!? It's a Friday night tradition in our house. What better way to end the week than with the whole family choosing their favourite toppings, arranging them carefully on their individual-size pizza crust, then enjoying gooey pizza goodness.

Everyone loves pizza – kids, teenagers and adults. It's the perfect family connection. And growing pizza ingredients in your own backyard is the perfect family project!

Growing a pizza garden is easy, and there is a role for every member of the family. Kids of all ages can help plan the garden and decide what plants to grow – the ultimate question is what do they want on their pizza?

Older kids can help with the digging and soil preparation. Planting, watering and weeding are jobs that even the very young aspiring green thumb can help with.

Before you know it your whole family will be eagerly anticipating the harvest and creating their own gourmet pizza masterpieces!

STEP 1: DESIGNING YOUR GARDEN

This is the chance for you and the kids to be creative. Sit down as a family and make a list of the toppings everyone likes on their pizzas and new toppings to try. There are some essential pizza garden veggies, like tomatoes and basil for the sauce, but just about



anything else is fair game. (See the sidebar for a full list of pizza ingredient plants for planning your garden).

Once you've decided what to plant, you'll need to decide what your garden should look like. You could grow your pizza veggies in a regular garden, but why not make your garden look like a pizza! Have the kids draw a garden map – a circle divided into slices for growing different types of plants, leaving space for paths if your garden space is large.

If you plan to start small, try using an old wagon wheel for structure or plant your garden in an old kiddie pool; both will give your child a garden space that is truly their own!

STEP 2: PICKING YOUR SITE & PREPARING THE SOIL

Your pizza garden will need to have at least 12 inches of soil and receive 6-8 hours of sunlight. If your soil contains a lot of clay, consider building a raised bed and adding some topsoil to ensure proper drainage. As you are digging your garden, add a layer of compost (a good inch thick) and turn it into the soil to provide extra nutrients for your plants.

To create your garden layout, put a stake in the very centre of your garden and attach a string that reaches to the outer border. Your child can hold the string taut and walk in a circle around the stake, creating the border with their footsteps. You can create a more permanent border by placing rocks in this circle, or making the area around the circle a mulched path of straw.

STEP 3: PLANTING TIME!

Take a family trip to your local garden centre or Ecology Park to find all the seeds and seedlings on your list. Use the planting guidelines on the seed packages for direct sowing, but don't worry about being exact. Invite your kids to sow the seeds with you – if your shoots come up too dense, you can always thin them out later.

Seedlings should be handled with some care when transplanting, but the plants suggested for your pizza garden are typically pretty resilient. In this area (zone 4), you can plant virtually anything by the last week of May and many things can go in the ground earlier.

STEP 4: HELP IT GROW – WATERING, WEEDING AND PEST CONTROL

This is where you really want your kids' help! By now they are hopefully well-committed to their future pizza toppings and ready to give the plants the love they need to grow. And

