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*To avoid the clumsy 'he/she', the child is referred to throughout as 'he'.*

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# Introduction

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Gardening offers children a wealth of knowledge and experiences and many opportunities to develop new skills. They may learn to grow and care for seeds and plants and to observe, discover and record how and why they grow, or fail to grow.

All of the activities are based on the principle that young children learn best by 'doing', so, whenever possible, children should be encouraged to do things for themselves and permitted to handle real objects and tools, under adequate adult supervision. Giving children plenty of opportunities to talk about what they are doing is also a vitally important part of the learning process and adults should always be prepared to engage in conversations with them and to offer explanations at appropriate levels.

Use buckets, tubs, window boxes, planters or similar strong containers, as they are more controllable and versatile than planting straight into the garden soil, but do also encourage the children to dig, hoe, rake and sieve in an area of the garden outside. Good quality child-sized gardening tools, that actually work, are now widely available from garden centres, toy shops and educational suppliers. Early years groups without access to an outdoor area of their own could carry out many of the activities indoors. When growing food crops, plan to cook them with the children and eat them together when they are ready.

The activities are linked to the Early Learning Goals of the Department for Education's revised *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage* (September 2012), and its guidance document, *Development Matters*. They respect the children's developing skills, abilities and self-images and encourage them to form positive relationships with each other and with the adults in their setting, as well as with their families at home.

Children learn through playing and exploring, creating and thinking critically. The role of an early years practitioner is to provide stimulating and challenging activities within an enabling environment. Ideas must be flexible enough to meet the needs of each individual as a unique child and to build upon the children's knowledge and interests to promote active learning. All of the activities in this book may be easily adapted to suit individual children or groups of any size.

The book uses materials which are likely to be readily available within your class or group's location, or which can be easily provided by the children's families or carers, if requested.