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Activity Idea

Three Indoor Garden Activities

Recommended for Ages 8 – 12

These activities are simple and great, even if you do not have a green thumb. Best of all, with many of these activities, kids can literally eat the fruits of their labor. This is a great chance to speak to kids about where their food comes from by planting seeds and then watching these living things grow into full-fledged plants that kids can pick and eat.

Activity 1: Grow Celery in a Dish
Growing celery from the bottom of a bunch is one of the easiest and most satisfying gardening activities to do with kids.

Supplies:

- Organic celery bunch
- Clear container
- Water
- Small pot or garden
- Optional: Planting container with drainage holes
- Optional: Potting soil
- Optional: A piece of screening, coffee filter, or paper towel

First thing you need to do is to get a bunch of celery. It must be a celery bunch with the stalk still attached and not pre-cut.

Using a large, sharp knife, cut off the bottom of your bunch of celery about 2 inches up from the base. Store the celery stalks until you are ready to eat them and save the base for the activity.

Take the base of your bunch of celery and put it in a small container filled with about an inch of water. Place the container in a bright area but out of direct sunlight.

Your celery should start to sprout in a day or two. Change the water every couple of days, and make sure the dish always has water.

Optional: If you want your celery to get bigger, plant it in a pot. First, to prevent soil from coming out, cover the drainage holes in the bottom of your pot with a piece of screening, coffee filter, or paper towel.

Then, fill your pot with potting soil until it is about 2 inches below the rim. Pat down the soil to level it and add water so it becomes damp but not soggy. Next, place the bottom of your sprouted celery base on top of the soil. Add about another inch of soil, so it surrounds the celery base. Finally, place the pot in full to partial sunlight, and water often enough to keep the soil damp. Then, watch your celery grow.

Activity 2: Grow Garlic Greens Indoors
This activity is one that exercises patience. Unlike the celery, garlic takes longer to grow. But once it does, you will have a yummy addition for pizza or pasta sauce.

Supplies:

- A head of garlic: It is okay if it has already started to sprout, though you want it to be firm and check that there is no rot
- Potting mix
- A container: A coffee can, or flowerpot works just fine

If you are using a can or another container without drainage, you will need to make holes so the water can get out. You can make several large holes with a can opener or use a hammer and large nail to punch them.

If your drainage holes are too large, you will need to cover them. This will keep the soil in and let water out, so your plants do not drown. You can cover the bottom with a paper towel or a coffee filter.

Fill the container with potting soil so the surface is about 2 inches below the rim.

Split your garlic head into cloves by prying it open. You want to keep as much of the skin on as possible, though it is okay to brush off some of the dry papery stuff.

Make sure the pointy part of the garlic clove is facing up and bulbus bottom of the head faces down.

Plant cloves, pointy side up in your container, poking them about halfway down into the soil. You can plant them close together, but make sure they are not touching. Fill the container with more potting soil until the soil totally covers the garlic by about a half-inch, making sure to fill in all the spaces between the cloves. Pat the soil down gently. Water slowly until water comes out of the bottom. Add more soil if you see any garlic cloves poking through the soil.

Water your garlic often enough so the soil stays moist, but not wet. In about a week or two you should see garlic shoots coming through the soil. Wait until they get a couple of inches tall before you start snipping them with scissors. Leave about an inch of shoot on each clove so the shoot will continue to grow.

Activity 3: Grow a Vine from a Sweet Potato
To sprout a sweet potato, you submerge half of it in water. This will grow into a cool plant. A huge bonus is that you can eat the young leaves and stems, both of which are really tasty.

Supplies:

- Sweet potato
- Toothpicks
- Glass container
- Shallow dish
- Optional: potting soil
- Optional: Planting containers

To get started, look for firm sweet potatoes without any major bad spots. It is better if they have not been refrigerated.

Locate the middle of the sweet potato and insert three or more toothpicks into it; they should go about 1/2 to 1 inch into the potato. Space the toothpicks evenly around the circumference of the potato. If the potato is too hard, you can drive a small hole with a thin nail, then stick the toothpick into it.

Place the sweet potato in a container of water. Keep the top 1/3 of the potato exposed resting the toothpicks on the rim of the container. The pointed end should be down in the water. In a few weeks, a vine with several stems will begin to sprout from the top of the potato.

Take each vine sprout and very carefully separate it from the potato by gently twisting the vine away from the body of the potato. There may already be a root structure attached to the vine. The root structure might look like little white hairs on the bottom of the vines.

Lay each vine into a shallow bowl with the bottom of the stem submerged in water and the leaves hanging over the edge of the bowl. New roots will begin growing from the bottom of the wine within a few days.

If you want to grow your sweet potato vines as decorative plants, find a small three- or four-inch seedling pot with good drainage. Once these plants have begun to grow indoors, they will be ready to transfer to larger container or outdoors.