

Plant zoo helps children appreciate gardening

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With two new grandchildren, my thoughts have wandered to gardening with children. Studies have been done that show that children are influenced in their attitudes toward plants and even their future dietary habits if they are favorably impacted with plants by the fifth grade or before.

You can't start too early. When our kids were growing up, I always showed them what could and could not be eaten, and they learned as soon as they could walk and talk. Unfortunately because of this, we never had sugar peas, strawberries, blueberries or salad greens on the table. As soon as we parked the car, the kids ran straight toward the vegetable patch and started "grazing" (yet I am sure that if we had put these in front of them at the table they would have ignored them).

Animals are always presented in children's books as cute and cuddly, i.e., with personalities, etc., so why not tap into this familiarity with animals and learn something about plants along the way? In this vein, the Reiman Gardens at Iowa State University have an introduction to plants for kids with a "Plant Zoo." They ask the kids to check off these plants in the garden

Garden Tales



Lamb's Ear (*Stachys byzantina*) has plush, velvety leaves. Stories are told that Victorian gardeners tied the leaves around their fingers as an

and give the reason for the names:

- Bee Balm: Bees enjoy the red, pink, or purple flowers of this plant.
- Butterfly Weed: The bright orange flowers are a magnet for butterflies.
- Cardinal Flower: The scarlet flowers are the color of our cardinals.

emergency Band-Aid. Shown here is the cultivar "Helen Von Stein," a large-leaved form that is somewhat resistant to the humid heat of the South.

- Cockscomb: The bright red, pink, yellow or orange flowers resemble a rooster's comb.
- Cranesbill: The beak-like fruit looks like a crane's bill.
- Lamb's Ear: The soft, velvety ears are a delight to children.

The plants that you could have in your own Plant Zoo are limitless. Explore the catalogs for Leopard's Bane, Catnip, Cattails, Cowslip, Dragon's Blood Sedum, Harebells, Pig Squeak, Tickseed, Wormwood, Zebra Grass, Buffalo Grass, Snake Plant, Butterfly Bush, Bugbane, Hens & Chicks, Toad Lily, Goldfish Plant, Spider Flower, Bear's Breeches, Ostrich Fern, Pussy Toes, Chameleon Plant, Fleabane, Monkey Flower, Pussy Willow, Kangaroo Paw, Bird's Foot Trefoil, Gooseneck Loosestrife, Ox-Eye Daisy, Dogtooth Violet, Cardinal Climber, Elephant Ear, Horsetail, Goatbeard, Lion's Ear, Turtlehead, Tiger Lily, Gooseberry, Spiderwort, Skunk Cabbage, Bat Flower and Foxtail Grass. Can you think of others?

At the Claude E. Phillips Herbarium, we have created a Web site "Plants for Kids." This site is organized for kids, parents and teachers with "Gee Whiz" experiments that illustrate basic principles of plants. Visit us at herbarium.desu.edu/pfk/index.html.

On the campus of Delaware State University, the Claude E. Phillips Herbarium is Delaware's center for research, education, and outreach about plant identifications, locations, and uses. Call 302-857-6452 (Dr. Susan Yost) to arrange a tour of the Herbarium, and call 302-857-6408 (Dr. Arthur Tucker) for more information about this article.

Submitted photo