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GARDEN GROW-HOW

Back-to-school garden design, by Leigh-on-Sea-based **Katrina Kieffer-Wells** from Earth Designs

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANNA OMIOTEK-TOTT PHOTOGRAPHY

If you've spent the summer wishing your garden was more child friendly we've got some great design tips on creating stylish, child-friendly outdoor spaces. As the children head back to school, why not rethink your garden and make it a place for you all to enjoy next year. Gardens have plenty to offer families, from play to education and life skills. But you don't have to compromise on style to have a great outdoors family experience.

Personal playground

The garden is an ideal playground for little explorers and adventurers. With imagination and clever design, they can climb, dig, grow, hide, swing and splash to their heart's content. But to avoid an unsightly mess of plastic, you can designate a specific area for play, or hide equipment among tall grasses and plants. Put trampolines and slides behind beds or decorative garden screens. And make sure you have plenty of storage for bikes and toys.

Wildlife friendly learning

There's an abundance of opportunity for learning experiences in the garden. By encouraging wildlife you can teach your children about life cycles and the environment. Encourage all kinds of fauna into your garden by growing fruit and berries, introducing bee and bug hotels, or water features. Stuff beds with long grasses and tall flowering plants (excellent for hiding play equipment behind!) and bring in the bees and butterflies.



'By encouraging wildlife you can teach your children about life cycles and the environment'



Communal spaces

As well as a play area, a family garden needs communal spaces. Outdoor spaces to cook, sit, eat and read are a lovely way to spend quality time together. Introduce comfy sofas and chairs, outdoor dining and - if you have the space and budget - an outdoor kitchen. These make great family spaces to hang out. But if you can't stretch to a kitchen, a firepit and some marshmallows work just as good.

Gardens of discovery and delight

Give your children a patch to grow their own plants and they will learn essential life skills and help them understand where food comes from. If your outdoor space is really small, invest in a living wall or a few pots and grow strawberries, tomatoes, blueberries and herbs. They're easy to grow and the children will delight in picking and eating their harvest.

Award-winning Earth Designs are members of the British Association of Landscape Industries and the Association of Professional Landscapers.

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