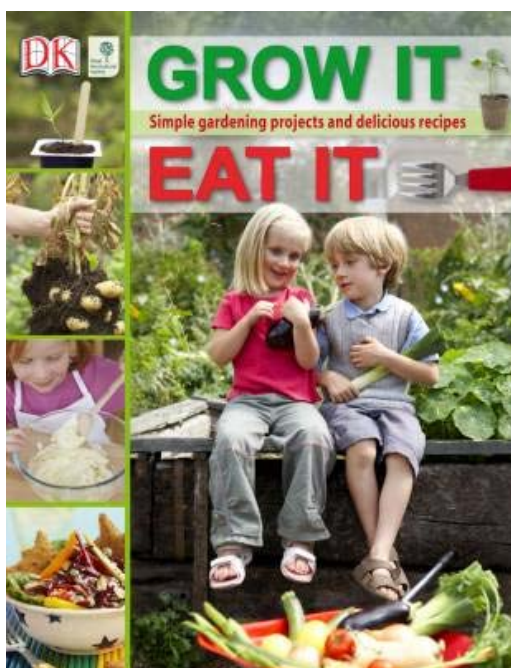


Book Review **Grow It, Eat It.**
A book by the Royal Horticultural Society

Green Culture Singapore Feature Article for April 2008

Published on 7 Jun 2008

• Text by Wilson Wong • Edited by Lynnette Terh •



“Grow It, Eat It” is a new hardcover book by the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) that combines two intimate subjects, the gardening of edible plants and cookery.

The cover features two kids sitting in a garden setting with a basket of harvested produce. The girl cradles an eggplant while the boy a leek. This is a clear message that tells us children, ages from five to eight years old, are the target audience of the book. The book is lavishly illustrated with colourful pictures and its contents are simple and concise. There is no technical jargon in sight. All the projects, presented in a step-by-step manner, can be done at home or school where most of the materials are readily available.

The book first introduced some important factors that are crucial for success in growing edible plants. Children were shown the need to provide ample sunlight and water and taught how to get good, fertile soil where one has to supplement the soil with compost. Pest control to protect our plants from harmful insect damage was also included. The bit on plants getting infected with diseases was not mentioned, however. Perhaps things could get a little too complicated for kids to comprehend. There was also an introduction on the seed germination process but do note that there is a small error in labelling of the seed and true leaves in one of the figures.

I was quite impressed with the book as it had not forgotten about today's pressing environmental issues. "Grow It, Eat It" advocates recycling and reusing waste materials for gardening. Children are encouraged to reuse various food containers that would be usually discarded for use as planting containers. There are also two pages done in a fun manner dedicated to making colourful plant labels from rocks and bases of plastic bottles.

The process of recycling kitchen waste to make compost is introduced and the various steps that should be taken are covered. Children are also given tips on how to make their own leaf mould. The benefits of mulching were introduced. Pest management is always done via organic and environmentally-friendly way. The process of pollination by bees was also described and kids are advised to follow organic practices on pest management as chemical pesticides can harm beneficial insects. Seed collecting and saving were included at the closing pages of the book.

The first of two very good tips that I have picked up from this book was the use of paper egg trays that can be used to raise seedlings and these will rot away when planted in the ground. If I were to follow this method, I don't have to buy any more expensive peat pots or Jiffy plant starters! The next good tip was to cap the top end of a bamboo support pole with a bottle to protect one's eyes! In Singapore, that could also prevent stagnant water from collecting inside the pole and thereby reducing the likelihood of mosquito breeding!

We are well aware that gardening and cooking can both be dangerous at times. Safety was never forgotten. Whenever the assistance from an adult is required, the book would specifically indicate this need via the appearance of an obvious, red exclamation mark. I would suggest that an adult should be present to oversee all steps a child is going through for safety's sake.

After the basics, the book continues with specific gardening projects accompanied by complementary cookery activities. Kids are treated to a variety of vegetables and herbs, which they can choose to grow. These include the tomato, eggplant, courgette, pumpkin, beans, potatoes, onions and leeks, carrots and so on. From this partial list of plants, it is evident that some of the plants are not suitable for growing under Singapore's tropical climate. In my opinion, that is the one shortcoming of the book - that it cannot be applied to our climate. However, it should not be too difficult for a budding adult gardener to come up with alternative suitable edible plants in place of those that are more suited for the temperate climate of United Kingdom.

Although not written explicitly in the book, the gardening projects were all carried out in an outdoor garden where sunshine is plentiful, even though all plants are touted to be able to be grown in containers. Due to the limited light availability in our highrise apartments, some of the edible plants may not grow as well. Parents and teachers need not despair as they can actually approach a nearby community garden for some space with the necessary light levels to carry out their gardening projects.

The cooking portion was presented in a fun way. A picture taking up an entire page of the finished culinary product frames up each individual cookery idea. Food that is presented in such a nice and enticing way that by just looking at the picture, one can actually be persuaded to put our hands together to start whipping up something right away. Step-by-step recipes for making frittata from courgettes, pumpkin pies, onion and leek soup, rainbow salad from multicoloured lettuce, strawberry meringue are just part of the long list of cookery projects that children and adults can undertake.

In one of the cookery projects, I was particularly surprised to see the novel idea of using cleaned, well-oiled, unglazed flower pots as containers to contain the dough that was baked to make sunflower seed bread loaves. Children must not rush to the garden and pick up a soiled flower pot for this project! It would be much safer to use brand new ones!

So whether your child is a budding gardener, creative chef or none at all to start with, "Grow It, Eat It" is a book that can be used to arouse some interest in your kid to take up gardening and cooking. Projects listed in the book will serve as a good starting point to draw your kid closer to you and let them have an opportunity to learn about and take part in the activities that take place in the garden as well as in the kitchen.

For kids who hate to partake vegetables, herbs and fruits, they may just change their mind after they have grown it painstakingly themselves! While in the process of growing their own food, they will probably find growing their own edibles fun and fascinating too, especially in highly urbanised Singapore where it is getting really difficult to see how our food plants are grown.

Product Details

Title: Grow It, Eat It
Format: Hardback
ISBN: 9781405328104
Size: 216 x 276 mm
Number of pages: 80
Publication date: 1 April 2008
Publisher: Dorling Kindersley

Feedback for this Article

Please post your thoughts or feedback for this article via the following topic in the Green Culture Singapore discussion forum.

<http://www.greenculturesg.com/forum/index.php?showtopic=12411>

If you have any enquiries or wish to publish a part or entire of this article, do send the Administrator a note via this email address – admin@greenculturesg.com.