

Throw a Garden Birthday Party

Overview: What better way to celebrate your child's birthday than with a garden party? Although fancy dresses and tea sandwiches may come to mind, kids love to run around outside, play games and get their hands into the dirt- all fun activities to keep them engaged and maybe even learn a little about the wonders of plants and seeds. Here are ideas for invitations, decorations, activities, refreshments and favors that will make your child's big day a memorable one.

Materials:

- An assortment of craft and planting supplies

Approximate Time to Complete: 3 or 4 hours to plan; 1 to 2 hours for the party

Location: Indoor or Outdoor

Ages: 2 to 10

Season: Any season, although spring and summer would be best

Instructions:

1. The first step is to design invitations. Gather up old gardening magazines and seed catalogs, purchase plant-related stickers or print out garden images from the internet. Next give the children glue sticks, scissors and construction paper and let creativity take flight. Encourage them to create colorful designs using clipped pictures of vegetables, fruits and flowers on the front of the paper, then add the party details on the back. For a girl's birthday you might say "Roses are red, violets are blue, (child's name) is turning (age) and wants to invite you ... to her Garden Birthday Party!" For a young boy, you might change it to "Red are tomatoes, green is my thumb, it's (child's name) (age) birthday, I hope you'll come!"
2. Plan the decorations. If the birthday falls in summertime, decorate with bunches of flowers from your garden or bowls mounded with colorful fresh vegetables. If it's too early to pick your own, a trip to the dollar store might yield plastic fruits, vegetables and flowers for very little cost.

Tie multi-colored helium-filled balloons into bunches, and tape a ring of green construction paper "leaves" around the bottom to make floating bouquets. For fall birthdays, a sheaf of cornstalks and a pile of pumpkins can set a harvest theme.

Set the table with a flowered tablecloth or perhaps a red and white checked one.
3. Plan a planting activity. Steps include:
 - Decorate a flower pot. Purchase a 4-inch clay pot for each child along with some craft paints and inexpensive brushes. Have a supply of old shirts on hand to use as smocks (or ask each child to bring one from home). Let the kids decorate the pots, then set them aside to dry while games are played and refreshments are served.
 - Pop in a plant. Once the pots are dry, let each child pot up a flower or vegetable seedling to take home. If it's spring, you might have marigolds or pansies to plant. Or you might have tomato or pepper seedlings that could be transferred to a garden at home. At other times of the year you might purchase small, easy-to-grow houseplants such as spider plants or African violets.
 - Plant seeds. If plants are not available, planting seeds is another option. Waiting for a seed to push through the soil is an exciting prospect for children, especially if it's one he or she has planted. Choose large seeds that are easy to handle, such as pumpkins, beans or zinnias.

4. Plan a craft activity. Make a plant pal using a pair of old pantyhose, a little bit of soil and some grass seed.
Steps include:
 - Cut a 6 to 8 inch long piece of panty hose (any color will work). If your piece does not include a toe, then knot one end of the hose and turn it inside out. It will end up looking like a little pantyhose bag.
 - Next scoop 2 to 3 teaspoons of grass seed into the closed end. Fill the rest of the hose with potting mix and tie the hose closed. Use your hands to gently shape the ball into a head shape.
 - Place the head in a shallow dish with the grass seed side on top. Use craft pieces such as wiggle eyes, buttons, pompom balls, felt and chenille sticks to make eyes, a nose, mouth and arms. Attach with craft glue.
 - When the kids get home and after glue has dried, tell them to carefully water their Plant Pal until the soil is thoroughly moist and place in a warm location. Within 3 to 5 days, the Plant Pal will begin to grow hair.

5. Plan some games. Here are a few ideas:
 - Watering Can or Soil Relay: Ask children to use a small plastic watering can to ferry water from one bucket to fill another. Or to really get their hands dirty, use a small shovel or trowel to transfer a heap of soil from a pile to a bucket- the team that's first to fill theirs is the winner. Make sure attendees know to wear play clothes to the party.
 - Host a Garden Treasure Hunt: Hide plastic fruits and vegetables around the yard for eager seekers to discover. Or get some plastic insects and have a bug hunt!
 - Pin the Bee on the Flower: Create your own "Pin the" game like Pin the Bee on the Flower or Pin the Tomato Hornworm on the Tomato.
 - Read a Garden Story: If things get too wild, settle things down by reading aloud the inspiring and wonderfully illustrated children's book, *Miss Rumphius*, by Barbara Cooney. It tells the story of a woman who, to fulfill her grandfather's directive to make the world a more beautiful place, decides to do so by planting lupine seeds wherever she goes, so that all can enjoy these beautiful flowers.

6. Decide on refreshments. Instead of a birthday cake, make individual cupcakes. Decorate them to look like flower blossoms – sunflowers, daisies and roses.

Serve a platter of fresh vegetables and dip. Cut radishes into roses. Use a cookie cutter to cut cucumber and pepper slices into flower shapes. Eat 'dirt'! Purchase some 4-inch plastic flower pots and wash them well. Insert a paper cup filled with chocolate pudding inside each pot. Crumble some chocolate sandwich cookies across the surface, stick a plastic flower into the "dirt" and have some Gummi Worms peeking out. Kids will love it!

7. Don't forget the party favors! Send children off with packets of seeds, kid-size garden gloves, small watering cans, sheets of flower stickers, Gummi Worms- and, perhaps, a little nibble from the gardening bug.