

madison area

fall/winter 2007/08

# Parent's Guide

**FREE!**

**Raising  
Green Kids**

see page 3

**Car Seat  
Safety Tips**

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**Fitness Options  
for Busy Parents**

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**Your Guide to Everything  
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music classes • retail • cloth diapers • parent groups • and tons more!

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# Raising Green Kids

By: Mary Ellen Schutz

Every parent hopes for a child who is kind, loving, and good to people and the world around her. And every parent knows that doesn't happen magically. So, just how do you prepare your child to be a responsible, environmentally aware citizen?

Experts agree that environmental awareness begins with exposure to nature. A child who experiences the outdoors, who learns to appreciate the beauty, variety, and wonder found there, grows into an adult willing to preserve that beauty, variety, and wonder. Experts also agree that children learn best what they live with at home. Your willingness to live environmentally sound practices and talk about the fact that "this is good for our earth," is directly proportional to your child's environmental awareness.

So, where to begin? Begin at home, with simple things.

**Recycle**—One of my children's favorite activities when they were young was the trip to the township hall on the day the recycling trailer came. (We lived in rural Michigan then, with no curbside recycling.) From the time they could walk, they carried non-breakable recyclables from the dish drainer to the sorting bins. Then on recycling day, we'd pack it up and head out. While not as good as the zoo, all those cans, bottles, and whatnots make a wondrous noise when thrown in the bin! When your two-year-old proudly tells next in line, "I'm taking care of our earth!" you know you're on the right track.

**Turn off the lights**—When you leave a room, reach for the light switch...or better yet, lift your child and let them hit the switch. Make them the hero for "saving energy and taking care of our earth."

**Read**—Take advantage of books about the environment. Eric Carle's series, *The Very Quiet Cricket* and *The Very Busy Spider* were bedtime favorites at our house. *Hooked on Nature* has a marvelous list of age-appropriate, entertaining, environmental reading materials at: <http://hookedonnature.org/childrennature/reading.htm>

**Go outside**—Your own backyard and neighborhood park offer a wealth of experience. See how many different plants you can find. Make or buy a bug box. Catch, observe, and release common insects. Fireflies are particularly fascinating, but ants, lady bugs, and daddy long legs can offer hours of entertainment and learning, too! Touch and feel; see how many different textures you can find. Look at common pebbles, tree bark, leaves, and moss with a magnifying glass. See if you can find the "pictures" hidden in the patterns. Lie down and check out the sky. You'll be amazed at what you see when you look at your neighborhood through your child's eye...and remember, dirt washes off, both you and your child. "We've taught a whole generation of children to be afraid of dirt," says organic farmer and mother of three green kids, Jennifer Kerr of Greenspirit Farm. "They are afraid to walk out in the fields, let alone play in the mud."

**Connect with your food**—In this age of mega grocery stores and fast food restaurants, introduce your child to the places their food actually grows. Bring your children along to the farmer's market. Give them a chance to meet the people who grow the food. Or let them grow some of their own. A small patch of dirt is all that's needed to plant a child's vegetable and flower garden. The sheer delight of watching the plants grow through the eyes of your child and that first taste of a snap bean or sugar pea grown from their very seeds is unequalled. Until my children were well into middle school, I had to grow "MOM's" bean and pea plants for kitchen use. Nary a bean or pea

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from the children's plants made it past the bounds of the garden, at least not outside a child's tummy. And I can't tell you how many neighbors were astounded to see their "I don't like...!" child, happily sitting in the dirt, munching on fresh berries and veggies in the children's garden.

No time for daily garden chores? There are several organic farms that welcome children for family picking expeditions and more formal programs. Blue Skies Farm ([www.blueskiesfarm.com](http://www.blueskiesfarm.com)) offers certified organic berries, heirloom and European vegetables, herbs and edible flowers, on a preserved 1867 homestead, just outside Brooklyn, Wisconsin. At the Blooming Valley Nursery ([www.bloomingvalley.com](http://www.bloomingvalley.com)), organic farmer and mother of two green kids, Ina Lukas' gardening programs introduce young children (ages 3–7 years) to the world of food kids can grow and flowers they can eat. Enjoy a garden tea party. Meet a butterfly. Or join in the once a month, May through October, Radicle Sprouts Workshop Series. Walk the trails through restored prairie and pick lovingly grown, chemical-free vegetables at Greenspirit Farm ([www.greenspiritfarm.com](http://www.greenspiritfarm.com)) near Dodgeville. Special events there include a strawberry ice cream party and pumpkin pick. Do remember, these are working farms, so prepare your children for farm life before you arrive. Keep them with you, in the rows, paths, and public areas. And try some store-bought produce before you go. Let your child tell you what's different about farm-fresh!

Hug a tree. Meet a pond. Take time to explore the woodlands. Nicki Maynard, proprietor of environmentally-friendly Nicki's Diapers and mother of two green kids, is a fan of New Glarus Woods State Park. "It's a favorite of ours, with the play set, berries for picking, trails to explore... Each season brings something different," she says. "And we talk about what we see, what we're doing, how things change." No need to travel, though. Right here in Madison, the University of Wisconsin Arboretum ([www.uwarboretum.org](http://www.uwarboretum.org)) offers kid-friendly walks and activities, including stories, crafts, and plant, animal, and natural phenomena explorations. Olbrich Botanical Gardens and the Bolz Conservatory ([www.olbrich.org](http://www.olbrich.org)) bring plants and special programs from all corners of the world into our very own backyard. The Aldo Leopold Nature Center ([www.naturenet.com/alnc](http://www.naturenet.com/alnc)) specializes in connecting families to the outdoors. Check out a program or just drop-in. Walking trails and touchable table displays are open from sun-up to sundown.

*Mary Ellen Schutz is a freelance writer and editor, who raised two green kids of her own in Madison, Wisconsin. You can visit her on the web at [www.GentleEditing.net](http://www.GentleEditing.net)*

You don't have to know it all! There are some terrific web resources for parents looking to raise environmentally-responsible children. When you're looking for answers and activities, check out:

### **California Strawberry Commission**

[www.strawberryville.com](http://www.strawberryville.com)

### **Ask Dr. Universe**

[www.wsu.edu/DrUniverse/BigQuestions.html](http://www.wsu.edu/DrUniverse/BigQuestions.html)

### **Handy's Little Helpers**

[www.earth911.org/master.asp?s=kids&a=kids/kids.asp](http://www.earth911.org/master.asp?s=kids&a=kids/kids.asp)

### **The EPA Environmental Kids Club**

<http://www.epa.gov/kids>

### **The Go Green Initiative**

<http://gogreeninitiative.org>

### **The Kaboose Family Network**

<http://www.kaboose.com>

### **Kid Source On Line**

<http://www.kidsource.com/education/teach.environment.p.k12.3.html>