

Ask a Master Gardener
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Fairy Gardens

Q. My granddaughters, ages 6 and 8, are spending a few weeks with me this summer, and I want to interest them in some garden activities. A neighbor mentioned developing a fairy garden; how can I involve them in learning some basics and still keep it fun?

A. Fairies and gardens have been linked in many literary and artistic pieces; one interesting project might be to do some research on planting selections that have “fairy” in their common name, and you will find that many of the “fairy” plants are wildflowers which are native to Georgia. For example, fairy candles (Black cohosh), fairy bells (Clintonia), fairy caps (Foxglove), and fairy lilies (Zephyranthes) are just a few that come to mind. Early settlers and Native Americans used many of these plants for medicinal purposes and growing them was critical for their health. Today, most of us get our medicines at the corner drugstore, but many gardeners show a pride in choosing to grow native plants. With the right care these native plants are sometimes easier to grow because they belong here. Incorporating natives with your established plants will help to bring good things to your fairy garden. One good resource for knowledge about these wildflowers is “Native Plants for Georgia, Part III, Wildflowers”, which was compiled by several writers and reviewed by Bodie Pennisi, Extension Floricultural Specialist. In addition to providing descriptions of beautiful wildflowers, the publication has great information about how to provide the right conditions for native plants. There are pages of colorful pictures for you and your granddaughters to consider. You can download this publication as UGA Extension Bulletin 987-3.

Have fun with your grandchildren because it should be for whimsy and fun, but it can have a more serious concept also. For example, one feature in many fairy gardens is that of attracting butterflies, the fairy candles (*Cimicifuga racemosa*) in addition to bringing the magic of fairies is an attractor of butterflies. There are many others such as purple cone flowers (*Echinacea purpurea*); and common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*). Hopefully, this exposure to the native plants will teach your granddaughters that there is a link between plants and native wildlife. It is never too early for them to learn about the foundation link in the food chain that supports other life forms. If the native plants disappear it will change the whole biology and balance of our ecosystem.

As you teach your granddaughters about plants and which “fairy” plants are the right ones for your site, you can bring them to the Buffalo Creek Garden to explore different environments. There are sunny spots with the right plants for full sun, and there are

beautiful shady spots with plants that thrive in the shade. There is even a wet boggy environment at the edge of some wet areas. Additionally, there are some outstanding examples of art for your granddaughters to enjoy with bright colors which will inspire them to develop some interesting ideas of their own. Then it will be fun to shop for items that will develop the magic of fairies, or you can craft some items that will provide fun on the rainy days that are a part of summer time in Georgia. There are interesting projects that incorporate using twigs and found objects to make art for broken terracotta pots. Chunks of broken rim can become stairs and tiny creeping plants and sphagnum moss can be combined with other small colorful plants such as the pink polka dot plant to create color and interest. Herbs blend well into these pieces and can be tasty additions to dinner; thyme has bush type plants that can be shaped into trees for containers.

For questions about gardening topics contact a Master Gardener volunteer at 770-836-8546, via email at ccmg@uga.edu or visit the UGA Extension office at 900 Newnan Road in Carrollton.