The Pediatrician's Guide to Green Parenting in Urban Areas

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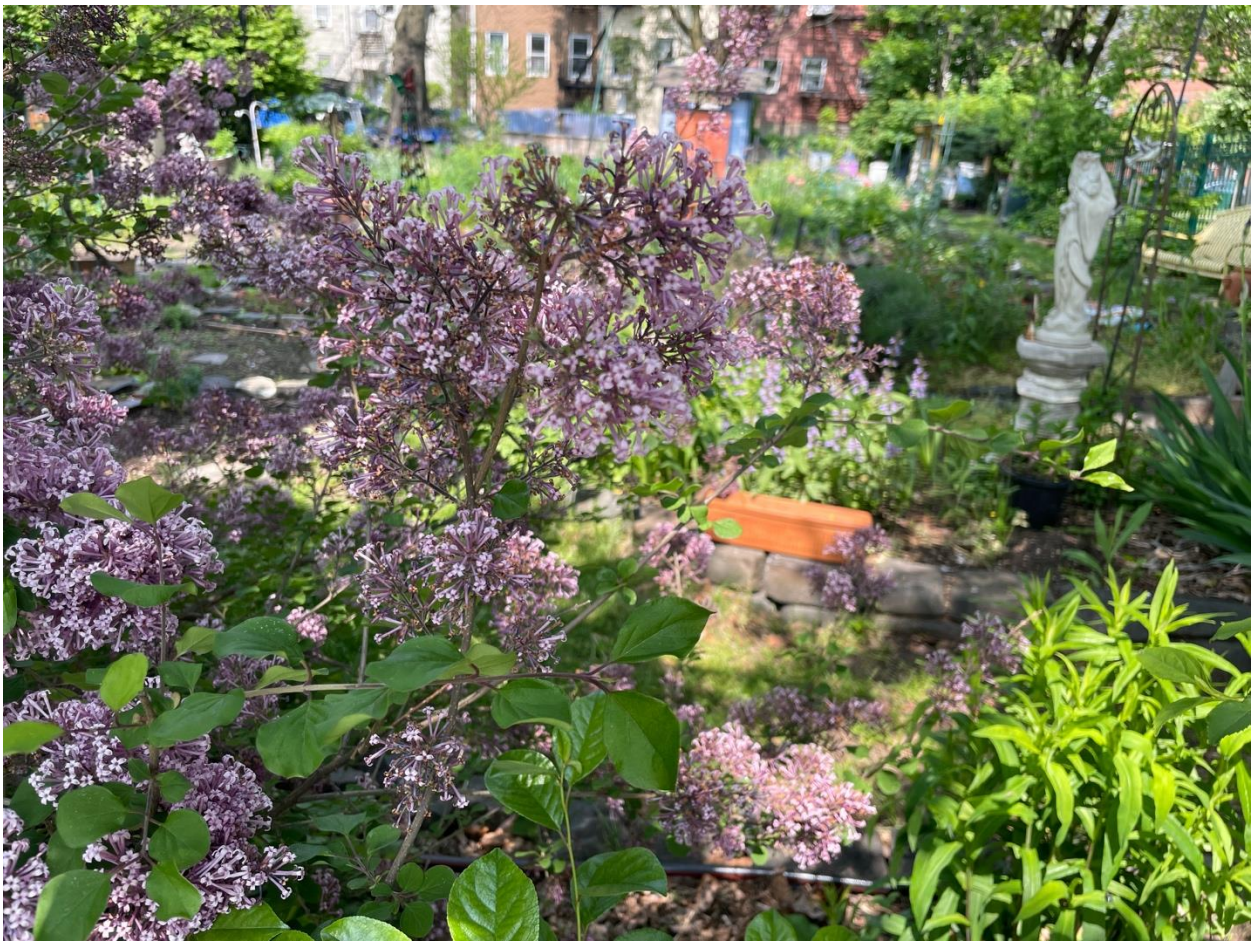
"Going green" is a catchphrase to some, a way of life to others, that connotes sustainability and environmental consciousness. It is important to emphasize the connection between environmental health and pediatric health to parents and families of our patients. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) released a policy statement called "Global Climate Change and Children's Health" in 2015 that highlights the role of the pediatrician in addressing climate change, underscoring the importance of anticipatory guidance in the matter. In accordance with this statement, pediatric providers should make green parenting, or raising children in an ecologically friendly manner, a routine conversation point during their well child checks. It is crucial to acknowledge that green parenting can come with appreciable logistical challenges, especially for families of lower socioeconomic status and those living in urban environments. Thus, the authors aim to provide pediatric providers with conversation points that make green parenting feasible for families living in urban areas.

- **Biking and walking** Opting to walk or bike over driving, when practical, is an excellent way for families to stay physically active together. Urban areas are often limited in open, green spaces but incorporating walks/rides can help promote motor development through exercise. Many cities now have public bicycle sharing systems which eliminates the need to own a bike. Just don't forget to emphasize the importance of helmet use!

- **Energy conservation** Encourage parents to talk to their children about making conscious efforts to conserve energy by turning off the lights and the television when they exit a room, running the washing machine only when there is a full load inside, and biking or walking when possible, as mentioned above. While these seem like inconsequential efforts, forming these habits from an early age can make a positive impact on the environment (and the monthly electric bill!).

- **Urban community gardens and farming** Urban gardens and farms are both run by and enjoyed by members of the community. Farms are focused on food production, which makes food easily accessible to families through distribution to local farmers markets and food pantries. Children can gain new skills in planting while stimulating intentional incorporation of fresh fruits and vegetables into their diet. There's also the added benefit of bonding with family, friends and neighbors while engaging in a community-wide project. Additionally, this is an opportunity for parents to replace harmful pesticides with safer alternatives that can be found in a household pantry, such as vinegar.

RIVERVIEW
COMMUNITY GARDEN



Riverview Community Garden in Jersey City, NJ
Photo by Kristin

- **Balcony plants and indoor plants** Plants improve air quality by reducing aeroallergens and therefore reducing triggers and exacerbations of atopic disease. Maintaining indoor and/or balcony plants comes with many of the same benefits as gardening, but in the comfort of one's home. This provides a great opportunity for families to grow their own herbs for seasoning home-cooked meals.

Growing indoor tomatoes, jalapeños, mint, and basil
Photo credit: Manali Shah

Indoor plants (all pet-safe)
Photo by Kristin

- **Recycling projects** Engaging children in the repurposing of old household items for new function or even decoration helps stimulate creativity while also being economical. Additionally, this eliminates waste that would ultimately wind up in landfills and decreases energy expended on processing new materials.

- **Composting** Children can partake in outdoor composting at a city compost center which promotes responsibilities and group effort just like community gardens do. For easier at-home composting, worm farms are a great way for children to get exposed to composting without expensive materials or any unpleasant smells! Not only is this a fun project for children, but it helps recycle nutrients for gardening and reduces food waste.

Worm farm
Photo credit: https://onehome.org.uk/topics/your-home-topics/gardens/invest-in-a-worm-farm/

Green parenting is an attainable goal for all parents, but may look different depending on the environment in which parents are raising their children. All the above provide the opportunity to teach children social responsibility from a young age, specifically that their actions have a direct impact on not only themselves, but their family, friends, and the environment in which they live. Pediatricians in urban settings should emphasize the possibility of green parenting, providing realistic tips that will benefit the health of their patients and the environment.