

The Laughing Mom: humorous tales of motherhood

Written by Susan Pfaltzgraff

A little dirt never hurt

The first summer after my daughter Melise was born, my darling husband built me a raised bed for a flower garden. I had visions of the serene bonding moments this would afford me and my daughter. Not to be so!

The first time working in that garden I stood Melise next to the retaining wall and I got to work. After a bit, I looked over at her and she was calmly inspecting the wall. Looked over again and she had a foot propped up on the wall like a rancher standing next to a fence. Looked over again and she was straining to see over the top of the wall. Looked once more to find her shoveling loose mud into her mouth!

I wiped my finger through her mouth to get the dirt out while she just giggled! I washed her off and gave her little lecture on what she shouldn't eat. Her big brown eyes just gazed innocently back.

I went back to the garden, this time setting Melise down on grass a little further away. When I looked back I saw her watching a passing cat or examining a blade of grass. I thought I had found contentment for both of us.

Then I noticed something on her face. A smudge where I had washed all the dirt off. Getting closer, I could see that she was giving intense interest to a patch of ground in front of her where both her hands were buried in the grass. I knelt down and was horrified to find that she had dug a hole in the ground through the grass. She gave me such a precious smile as the dirt drooled down her chin!

After I cleaned out her mouth again, I decided that I had done plenty of gardening for one day.

Dangerous edibles are found in the house as well as out. As soon as my daughter started crawling she seemed magnetically drawn to every dead bug on the floor. No matter how good

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of a floor inspection I did before I set her down, she would immediately crawl to the nearest dusty moth or crunchy grasshopper and delightedly pick at them!

She learned too quickly that if I see her with something icky that I'll take it away. Sometimes she waited for me to stop watching before she quietly made her way to the bug, coolly covered it with her hand, turned her head away from me and then brought it to her mouth. I like to think that I've caught her in the midst of all these sneaky acts, but should I be asking myself how long this actually worked for her before I caught on?

Often the constant vigilance stressed me to the point of tears, but I had a little trick to calm myself. It went like this: What does it mean that my daughter tastes everything? She's curious. What does it mean that she digs in the grass to find dirt? She's a problem-solver. What does it mean that she stubbornly seeks out dead bugs and tries to slyly eat them? She knows what she wants and sees no limits to getting it. What does it mean that she screams when I take the bug away? She feels deeply and is not afraid to express it. At the end of this trick I am quite confident that my child is the most brilliant and perfect individual on the planet (as all parents should believe) and I am also quite amused.