



# Nature Play Activity Guide

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by Green Space Learning

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# Supporting Exploration

Encourage children to touch, smell, interact and use plant life in their play. They may pull leaves off a stem for use in the mud kitchen, pick them as a loose part, hide in between the plants or simply touch and feel the flowers and leaves. This is part of nature learning and is encouraged.

In garden boxes and throughout the natural space, plant enough to allow children to touch, feel and explore the plants. They may even pull them out, this is how children learn about plants. Simply replant if possible.

Encourage teachers and adults to give as much time as possible for play and discovery, while the grown-ups observe and interact only when needed to scaffold learning or for safety reasons.

Nature play lets children access what they need for cognitive, motor and sensory development, math, science, art and more! Below are just a few examples of activities to inspire play in your new outdoor learning environment.

Share your favorite activities with us!





# Art Activities & Provocations

- Set out glue, paper, scissors and other art supplies to inspire art with found natural items
- Provide a clipboard and paper for children to draw and document their observations from the garden or natural space
- Provide disposable cameras for children to photograph what they observe in the Nature space. Create a class book for the library center with the photographs.
- Take a nature walk and collect materials for a nature collage. Provide glue and paper or cardboard for collage work. Use sticks, pine branches, pinecones with paint and paper to create interesting marks and textures.
- Wrap a large piece of paper around a tree trunk and add crayons for drawing.
- Collect small sticks and add clay or playdough to build structures. Add acorns, small sticks and leaves to playdough.
- Find an interesting medium sized branch and place it in the center of the art table. Set out baby jars of paint and a variety of brushes. Encourage the children to paint the branch.
- Paint river rocks of various sizes. Create a rock garden when they dry.



# Water & Sensory Play

- Test different items down the sluice, watch what floats and sinks
- Add baby shampoo to water to create bubbles in sensory tables
- Collect small containers, strainers, manual egg beaters, tongs, whisks and small watering cans for water play
- Freeze flowers, small rocks and sticks, sea shells in paper cups. Once frozen peel the cup and place the ice in the sensory bin. Observe as it melts and reveals the frozen treasures.
- In winter months use the incline of the sluice as a ramp for rolling items such as cars and balls. Place some items that won't roll in a bucket along with items that do roll to test out which items roll, which ones don't, what items roll fast or slow.
- Fill sensory tables or bins with feed corn and ornamental corn cobs. Add tweezers, small scoops and containers for sensory play.
- Fill sensory tables with pinecones, river rock, small branches and tree cookies add small plastic animals for sensory and imaginative play.
- Fill the sensory table with sand and add seashells, small buckets and shovels.

# Language & Literacy

- Provide pencils and Nature Notebooks to draw what they find, create tracings, or leaf rubbings
- Help your plants stay happy by having your students sing, tell stories or read aloud to them periodically. Children get practice with language skills but without pressure of a critical listener
- Name the plants in your garden, create written & picture labels for plants
- Have students dictate a story from their imagination about the garden and then use the stage area to act it out
- Go on a scavenger hunt! Ask children to find items that match descriptive language (smooth, bumpy, soft, rough, narrow, thick, heavy, light, etc)



# Garden Activities

- Pick flowers for play or a centerpiece during mealtime, add metal or plastic containers for arrangements
- Place small watering cans near the hand-pump or outdoor sink to allow children to fill and water the plantings
- Take students out to observe using their five senses as science tools (bring snack to eat for sense of taste). While observing, discuss similarities/differences of physical characteristics.
- Follow up with a physical characteristic scavenger hunt as a follow up. (Ex: "Point to something bumpy; stand by something round")
- Plant seasonal vegetables. Once grown make a salad together. Talk about how food is grown on farms for people to eat.
- Pick flowers and leaves to add to the mud kitchen
  
- Garden Box Planting Suggestions
  - Hardy vine plants
  - Annual flowers: Marigolds, Sunflowers, Zinnias, Lambs ear, Milk Weed
  - Vegetables:
    - Early Spring (Mid-March): Lettuce, carrots, spinach, beets, kale, swiss chard
    - Mid-Spring (May-June): Beans, corn, zucchini, gourds, pumpkin June 1.
    - Fall vegetables (Sept - Oct): Cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, Broccoli, Brussel sprouts, beets, kale, swiss chard, parsley.



# Loose Parts Play

- Provide new loose parts (tree cookies, sticks of differing sizes, short and long wood boards, larger river rocks and stones, bricks PCV pipes and fittings)
- A variety of tools, including shovels let children dig, build and explore heavy work
- Supporting Loose Parts play:
  - Provide ample materials for children to engage with
  - Provide ample opportunity for children to explore and work with the loose parts.
  - Leave creations out for a period of time, the children will add to and take away from their projects. Note the changes made by children as they test their ideas.
  - Observe the play and listen to the conversations children are having as they play. This will guide teachers in what materials and tools to add to the collection based on the children's interests.

# Social-Emotional

- Provide pans, bowls, cups and mixing utensils to make mud-muffins
- Scarves or silks let children dress up in costume, put on a show, make a fort, or carry items; place them near the stage
- listening to 5 close eyes and listen raising one finger for each new sound you hear.
- Garden Relaxation- Challenge students to find the best way to relax in the garden. Have them explore each of their senses. Maybe they like smelling plants, maybe it is listening to birds, or touching different leaves. They can even vote and share their ideas with other classes.
- Stack stones using river rock, encourage children to stack and balance stones into sculptures. Children can work alone or in pairs.
- Make "paint" by mixing dirt and water, then have children paint rocks with mixture. When they are finished working, talk to them about the process, how they felt and listen to their responses.

# CONTACT US



Green Space Learning is here as you get to know and explore the possibilities of your new outdoor space.

Keep in touch and always let us know how we can support you.

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