

Nature Play: Create With Nature

Encourage kids to directly engage with nature through tinkering and sculpture, in a safe and supportive environment.



The Importance of Nature Play

Conserving nature begins with connecting to nature. Research shows that giving families opportunities to engage in hands-on nature-based activities can increase children's excitement toward environmental behaviors. Through Nature Play, parents and caregivers can promote that connection to nature.

Choosing the Right Spot

Find a safe area that is away from traffic, and free of trash and hazardous materials. Parks, gardens, and backyards are great places to start. It may help to have a dry, flat area such as a bench, tarp, or picnic blanket on which to build your creations.

What to Bring

All you need is weather-appropriate clothing, natural items found outside, and your own creativity. Work together to gather natural objects to build with. Try to find objects in a variety of shapes and sizes. Avoid picking or breaking live plants unless you have permission to do so. See below for a few object ideas.

Objects to Try

- Landscape trimmings
- Wood rounds
- Pinecones
- Sticks
- Branches
- Dry leaves
- Pine needles
- Rocks
- Wood chips
- Sand
- Seeds
- Seashells



Offer an Idea or Challenge to Get Started

Make a pretend house for an animal, favorite toy, or imaginary creature, like a fairy house.

Spell out your name using the found objects.

Have a competition to see who can build the highest tower.

Create a model of something you've seen before, such as an animal, a person, or landmark.



Play Together

Create something together or build your own creation alongside the kids. Being interested and involved in the process turns the activity into a social, and often bonding, experience. When you are having fun, others will too.

Encourage everyone to participate in their own way. Some kids may want to build together while others want to make their own creation. Some kids may be excited to make what you suggested while others want to do something else. Encourage each child's individual interests and let them guide the activity.

Model how to take risks and learn from failure. Keep an upbeat attitude when your rock tower collapses or the wind blows over your bug house. Recover from those challenges by talking about what you learned from that experience and using that knowledge to try out new ideas. Ask for help and experiment with ways to make the structure more sturdy.



Facilitate Meaningful Conversations

Ask kids to tell you about their creations.

Recognize and celebrate creativity.

Use "I notice...", "I wonder..." and "It reminds me of..." statements to model inquiry and exploration.

Clean Up and Reflect on the Experience

Give a 5-minute warning before you intend to clean-up to avoid disappointing an in-progress artist or architect. Optionally, take a few photos of your creations before you clean them up.

Ask everyone to help gather and clean-up the materials. Return all of the natural objects back where they were gathered. Look around to make sure no litter or personal belongings are left behind.

As your cleaning up and heading out, talk together about what you found and what you made. Share photos or stories of the experience with family and friends.