

Healthy Body, Happy Me 2023

Nature





Nature

Being outdoors and engaging with nature offers rich, sensory and stimulating experiences to support children's developing communication skills which cannot be replicated indoors, such as encountering wildlife first hand and experiencing the changing seasons.

Children can move more freely outdoors as there is generally more space, supporting them to develop their physical strength and co-ordination, take risks, work cooperatively on a larger scale and communicate differently using louder voices as they enthusiastically share their discoveries. Playing outdoors is also important for health as it provides exposure to sunlight (providing vitamin D) and fresh air, which contribute to stronger immune systems and increased wellbeing. Both children and adults need a sufficient level of vitamin D to build and maintain strong, healthy bones and teeth and to boost immunity and improve mood.

Do experiences with nature promote learning? Conveying evidence of cause and effect relationships (2019), evidenced that nature helps both children and adults feel less stressed, more engaged and more attentive, literally reviving anyone who is mentally fatigued. Nature can also actively help with concentration by providing a calmer, quieter space for learning.

Today's Healthy Body, Happy Me will provide you with lots of ideas to engage children in conversations and experiences to get them active or thinking actively outdoors.



Go on a scavenger hunt



Spotting wildlife



Activity 1 Wildflower meadow

Wildflowers are a pretty and colourful addition to any outdoor space and are important for supporting biodiversity, attracting wildlife such as bees, butterflies, ladybirds and spiders. The most attractive way to grow wildflowers is by planting a meadow, but you can grow your own wildflowers within limited spaces.

Wildflower meadow

Activity outline

- Create your wildflower area
- Engage children in conversations about what they think the seeds will need to grow. Seeds prefer light, well-drained soil and direct sunlight so choose a planting area that offers the best conditions. If you don't have a planting area you can grow wildflowers in pots, window boxes or recycled tyres
- Ask the children if they know how to keep birds from eating the freshly sown wildflower seeds. Hanging up some old CDs around your flower patch will reflect light and scare birds off safely
- Take photographs at each stage of your meadow project and create a book for children to recall what happened. Encourage them to share the book with their friends and talk about what they did
- Once the meadow has grown, spend time enjoying the flowers, looking for insects and observing the changes
- Collect some of the seeds at the end of the season to plant next year.

Top environmental tip: Peat-free compost is better for the environment as peat stores carbon dioxide which is released into the atmosphere when it is dug up.

Learning opportunities include:

- Learn about growing, life cycles, insects and minibeasts
- Listening and attention skills
- Develop new vocabulary
- Support well-being
- Use their senses.



Resources

- Planting area, wildflower seed mix
- Pots, window boxes or recycled tyres
- Gardening tools, watering can
- Stones, water, old CDs.



The sound of nature

Top tip

Encourage children to stop and listen to all the sounds they can hear outdoors, e.g. buzzing of a bee, rustling of the leaves.

Activity 1 Continued...



Extension ideas

Go on a minibeast hunt to see what insects your wildflowers have attracted. Keep a wildlife log which children can add to as they discover new insects and minibeasts.

If you have a large outdoor area, consider creating a meadow space. Try mixing the seeds with a small amount of dry play sand so you can see where they have been sown. Leave small pathways between the flowers which children will love to explore freely.

Read books about growing such as 'Once There Was a Seed' by Judith Anderson, 'The Tiny Seed' by Eric Carle or 'The Enormous Turnip' by Cristiana Cerretti.

Key vocabulary might include:

- Water, watering can, sunlight, pour
- Wildlife, names of minibeasts and how they move
- Seed, shoot, root, seedling, stem, leaf, bud, petal, flower
- Wildflower, meadow, scent
- Rake, trowel, dig, soil, mud
- Sow, plant, grow.

Ideas for different ages

Babies benefit from unique sensory experiences in nature. Provide babies with lots of time outdoors allowing them to experience different views, sounds and natural textures safely. For example, place babies near bushes or trees so they can hear the leaves rustling in the wind or look around for different birds as they hear them call. Let the grass grow long in places so they can feel it in-between their toes as they move their bare feet back and forth.

Engage babies and toddlers in messy mud play where they can squish, dig, pile or push mud around. Provide a range of small plant pots, seed trays, mini trowels and watering cans for them to fill, empty and explore. Play alongside the children, talking about what they are doing so they link actions to words.

Activity 2 Edible spring gardening

Growing fruit and vegetables at nursery is a great opportunity for young children to develop curiosity about how things grow and where their food comes from while developing a rich descriptive vocabulary. Spark children's interest in growing by creating your own edible spring garden. Your children will love sowing seeds, watering plants and eating the food they have helped to grow.

Edible spring gardening

Activity outline

- Choose fruits and vegetables which are quick and easy to grow, e.g. cherry tomatoes, lettuce, peas or strawberries
- What do the children think plants need to grow? How will they care for them? Where would the best place be to grow the plants?
- Support children to sow seeds or plant seedlings. Label the tubs or patch so you know what has been planted
- To care for the crops, introduce a watering and feeding schedule. Children can record each time the crops are tended and will delight in checking the crops each day. Talk about any changes they notice
- Measure the plants and encourage children to predict how tall the plants will grow, how many peas will be in a pod, etc.
- When ready for harvest, eat as delicious snacks or use them in cooking, e.g. adding tomatoes to homemade pizzas
- Encourage children to use vocabulary to describe the tastes and textures of the fruit and vegetables.

Top tip

Encourage children to use new words by giving them choices. Rather than saying, "Would you like to try this one?" ask them, "Do you want to try a strawberry or tomato?"

Health and safety

Take into consideration any allergies and always follow the latest advice on the prevention of choking: <https://bit.ly/3XwWONx>



Resources

- Fruit and vegetable seeds or young plants
- Multi-purpose compost and plant food
- Gardening tools, watering can, water
- Space or pots for growing
- Labels, pen, tape measure.

Learning opportunities include:

- Learn how to care for growing plants
- Understand what plants need to grow
- Name and describe different foods
- Understand where food comes from
- Develop gross and fine motor skills
- Mathematical development.

Activity 2 Continued...

Key vocabulary might include:

- Growing, tall, tallest, long, longest
- Sweet, bitter, sour, juicy, crunchy, soft
- Fruit, vegetable, names of fruits and vegetables
- Seeds, seedlings, roots, shoots
- Plant food, feeding, watering
- Growing patch, crops, labels
- Pot, planter, hanging basket
- Watering can, trowel, fork
- Measure, record, predict
- Compost, soil, dig
- Pips, stones.



Ideas for different ages

For babies and toddlers, create a fruit and vegetable treasure basket by filling it with a range of fruits and vegetables with different shapes and textures. Comment as they explore, e.g. "You've got a thin carrot with a long green swishy top" or "Look at the colourful dragon fruit with leathery skin and waxy star fruit with five points".

Re-purpose the fruits and vegetables where possible by washing them thoroughly and preparing them for a tasting session. Make sure they are safe for babies and toddlers to eat. Encourage them to taste different foods, commenting and providing them with vocabulary such as sweet, bitter, juicy, crunchy.



Extension ideas

Explore the insides of different fruits and vegetables. Ask the children to predict what they think is inside, then support them to cut them up and explore. Talk about similarities and differences and how to prepare different foods for eating. Talk about what is safe and not safe to eat.

Plant herbs, e.g. basil, mint, chives in empty yoghurt pots with holes in the bottom to take home to place on their windowsill.

Play 'name the fruit' by describing a fruit hidden in a bag for children to guess. Whoever guesses correctly takes the next turn.



Activity 3 Nature transient art

Transient art refers to art made of moveable pieces. Natural transient art experiences encourage children to re-purpose open-ended materials again and again, using their imagination and creativity to explore endless possibilities. Open-ended exploration leads to children using rich language to describe their creations.

This activity will provide children with an enjoyable experience, the opportunity to express themselves verbally and non-verbally through the medium of transient art as well as introducing the concept of sustainability.

Nature transient art

Activity outline

- Take the children on a nature walk to forage for resources or place natural resources in your outdoor space. Explain they should only collect items which have naturally fallen to the ground and take only as much as they need
- Remind children to wash their hands after foraging and never to put foraged items in their mouths
- Put an old towel on the floor for children to place their items. Look carefully for any insects. Identify what they are and talk about their features. Agree how you can help them back to their natural habitat
- Let children explore the natural resources and create pictures. They can use a frame (see resources), work independently or collaboratively, on a small or large scale, indoors or outdoors
- Encourage descriptive language, talking about textures, patterns, shapes, properties, etc. and discussing their creations
- Encourage children to take photographs; make a transient art book for them to recall their creations with each other.

Learning opportunities include:

- Communicate and share ideas, thoughts and storytelling
- Discover how to re-purpose open-ended resources
- Construct and deconstruct
- Explore and build on ideas
- Explore concepts such as patterns, shape, size, reflection, symmetry
- Express imagination and creativity.

Top tip

Don't be afraid to use rare and infrequent words to extend children's current vocabulary.



Resources

- Frames for children's art, e.g. picture frames (without the glass), place mats, mirrored tiles, plain card, old sheets masking tape
- Range of natural materials, e.g. twigs, pebbles, leaves, dandelions, fallen flower petals, grass, conkers, fir cones, acorns, pine cones, straw, shells
- Containers, old towel.

Activity 3 Continued...

Extension ideas

Explore the concept of transient art by looking at famous examples such as those by Andy Goldsworthy (land and nature art), Walter Mason (leaf art) and Richard Long (stones art). Talk about what they notice, identifying what they like, don't like and why.

Include a transient art area in continuous provision with a range of natural and man-made objects stored in open display baskets, e.g. bottle tops, corks, metal nuts and bolts, etc. Display pictures of artists' transient art creations in the area and discuss with the children.



Making your own transient art

Ideas for different ages

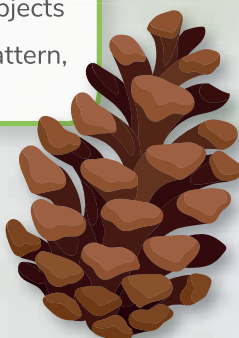


Provide treasure baskets filled with natural resources for babies to explore. Comment on textures and properties such as smooth sides, pointy corners.

Laminate a range of contrasting leaves. Cut them out by following the outline of the leaf shape, punch a hole and secure with a key ring loop. Alternatively create pairs for children to find ones that are the same. These laminated leaf keyrings will encourage toddlers to talk about shapes, sizes and colours of the leaves.

Key vocabulary might include:

- Nature, natural, man-made
- Forage, collect, frame
- Descriptive features of objects
- Art, sculpture, picture, pattern, design, symmetry.





Activity 4 Bug bed and breakfast

Did you know that at least two thirds of all living species on the Earth are insects and that three quarters of our crops are dependent on insect pollination?

Creating a bug bed and breakfast in your outdoor space will provide a welcoming habitat for lots of different types of bugs such as ladybirds, bees, spiders and woodlice. Insects will be able to use the habitat as a safe space to shelter and lay their eggs; in return they will break down plant matter to create nutrient-rich organic soil, pollinate plants and prey on unwanted pests.

Children will have lots of fun creating the bug bed and breakfast and you can introduce lots of new vocabulary and engage them in rich conversations.



Resources

- Dead wood, sticks, bark, dry leaves, bamboo canes
- Unwanted tiles or roofing felt
- Corrugated card, old carpet
- Straw, hay, wood shavings
- Clipboards, paper, pencils
- Plastic bottles, hollow tubes
- Bricks, stones, old plant pots
- Wooden pallets.

Bug bed and breakfast

Activity outline

- Research garden insects with the children. Look at their habitats and conditions they prefer to live in. For example, woodlice like damp, dark places in walls and under stones, whereas ladybirds like shrubs, grasses and trees. Brainstorm what resources they could use for a bug bed and breakfast. Record the findings
- Decide a suitable space for the bug B&B - where it won't be disturbed, ideally in a damp space in the semi-shade, by a hedge or under a tree
- Place a wooden pallet in your chosen location. Problem solve how you will construct additional levels (e.g. alternating layers of bricks and pallets). Test out the ideas, checking the structure is sturdy and balanced at each stage
- Discuss what would make a good roof to keep off heavy rain. Why?
- Next create the interior of the bug bed and breakfast. Refer children back to their research and give them time to explore and assemble the resources available
- Give your bug B&B a name and create a sign.

Learning opportunities include:

- Construct, problem solve, test out different ideas
- Develop spatial awareness skills
- Develop knowledge of habitats and what different insects need to survive
- Use imagination and creativity
- Work collaboratively.

Some tried and tested for bug B&B:

- **Solitary bees:** Cut the base off a plastic bottle and fill with bamboo canes for laying their eggs
- **Ladybirds:** Use wood shavings, dry leaves, sticks or straw for hibernation
- **Lacewings:** Cut the base off a plastic bottle and place rolled up corrugated card inside for them to hide
- **Beetles, centipedes, spiders and woodlice:** Provide dead wood and loose bark for them to crawl in and shelter
- **Frogs and toads:** Create larger holes with stones and tiles to provide cool, damp places

Top tip

Model how to listen to each other. For example, "Imran has something really important to tell us about bees; let's listen to what he has to say."

Activity 4 Continued...

Extension ideas

Provide clip boards, paper, pencils, magnifying glasses and insect identification sheets for children to record the insects that visit.

Try a mini bug flat attached to your fence, e.g. a section of drainpipe or a tin open at both ends with hollow bamboo canes placed inside.

Encourage families to create bug habitats at home.

Key vocabulary might include:

- Names of different bugs (ant, beetle, spider, woodlouse, ladybird)
- Habitat, hibernate, eggs, larvae
- Damp, dry, cool, shelter, shade, semi-shade, waterproof
- Pallets, bricks, straw, hay, wood shavings
- Stones, wood, sticks, bamboo, leaves, bark
- Cardboard, tubes, bottles, pots.

Ideas for different ages

Make a rainbow key wind chime for babies to watch and listen to outdoors.

What you will need:

- A sturdy stick approx. 10"/25cm long
- String or wool
- Recycled keys
- Lengths of different coloured ribbon.

What to do:

- Cut lengths of string or wool approx. 10"/25cm long
- Tie each piece to the stick, leaving a gap of 1"/2.5cm between each piece
- Tie a key to the bottom of each piece of string or wool
- In between each piece of string or wool tie a length of different coloured ribbon
- Attach another piece of wool to the stick to create a hanging loop
- Place outdoors, hanging from a tree, or similar, where it can be watched by the babies.



Further resources, links and stories:

Nature Play - Inspiring Outdoor Approaches - NDNA publication

<https://bit.ly/3waSHLk>

Nurturing Well-being and Resilience - NDNA Training

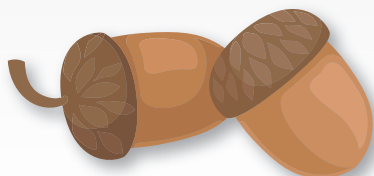
<https://bit.ly/3GLfbre>

Outdoor Play - NDNA publication

<https://bit.ly/3XEDuhx>



Growing our own food



Opening a bug B&B

National Day Nurseries Association

At NDNA, we don't just provide nursery membership, lobby government and offer training, we are dedicated to making a difference. We are a charity that believes in quality and sustainability so we put our members' businesses at the very heart of ours. We enhance, support, nurture, cherish and challenge.

Every year we run an annual Healthy Body, Happy Me campaign to encourage better health and happiness by giving nurseries FREE resources for play, learning and fun.

Get involved with our 2023 campaign and help keep your children happy and healthy.

Important: Activities with children must always be risk assessed, including for allergies or choking. Children must always have adequate supervision. Resources and materials must always be appropriate for children's age and stage of development.



National Day Nurseries Association

National Day Nurseries Association

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