

What's in a Nature Play Box?



Did you know that unstructured, active, and informal outdoor play with limited adult-guidance is known as Nature Play? This type of play helps kids of all ages boost their cognitive, creative, physical, social and emotional skills encouraging them to be more resourceful, productive, and collaborative individuals. So, of course, we love when kids have a chance to independently explore and create in their gardens.

Here is a comprehensive list of everything one would find in a **City Blossoms Nature Play Box**, along with a few of our favorite ideas for independent stations and activities to do in your garden. Many of these items can be collected for free, so this box is low cost and always changing as teachers and kids discover new ways to explore in the garden. Don't have a garden? Just exchange the box for a backpack and your nature play to your local parks and greenspaces.



LOOSE PARTS PLAY: Materials that are good for building, and manipulating:

- Bark pieces
- Kitchen tools (i.e. strainers, mixing spoons)
- Ribbon or scarves
- Sanded wooden blocks of various sizes
- Pine Cones
- PVC pieces cut to different lengths
- Wooden dowels cut to different lengths

TOOLS FOR EXPLORATION: Supplies for imaging, and exploring:

- Different colored yarn cut to 6-8 inches
- Egg cartons
- Kid-safe scissors
- Magnifying glasses
- Paint chip samples with range of colors
- Plastic insects
- Plastic tweezers
- Trays or containers for collecting
- Trowels

NATURAL ART: Ingredients for creating:

- Chalk or chalk markers
- Clip boards
- Clothespins
- Contact paper
- Cotton swabs
- Markers/crayons/colored pencils
- Masking or duct tape
- Paper
- Tempera paint





SOME INDEPENDENT STATIONS TO ENCOURAGE AND INTRODUCE NATURE PLAY CONCEPTS:

Color Matching with paint chips or yarn: Encourage kids to find the many colors in the garden. Handing out paint chips and ask students to see how closely they can match the color on the chip to something outdoors. Then see if they can find this color in several places.

Digging Bed and Building: Whether a raised bed or a tub full of soil and leaves, a designated area to dig and build with loose parts is always a popular way for kids to experience nature. Encourage kids to use materials they find in the garden to add to any structures they make.

Independent Garden Care: Watering plants is always a good way to explore the garden, observe how water absorbs into the soil, and just as importantly make sure to regularly care for plants.

Insect Investigation: Hide big plastic insects around the garden including places you might find the real things. This is a fun way to survey how many insects you can find and collect them in a special insect collection container. See which insects were easier to find, harder to find and if you saw any real insects as you were searching.

Nature Mandalas, faces or other creations: Collect natural materials with a variety of colors, sizes and textures in mind. Try sorting pieces into categories and using them to create something new like mandalas (geometric circular design), faces, and other works of art. Try taking pictures of these creations and hanging them up or sending them home with kids.

Nature Painting: Collect a variety of natural materials on a neighborhood walk or in the garden to use as the bristles for paint brushes. Help kids put a few items at a time into a clothes pin or taped to the tip of a stick. With tempera paint and paper, try out the different materials and see all the variety in textures and patterns.

Quiet Place to Read: Setting up a place to read in a corner or underneath some shade can be a nice chance for some quiet time. Pick out some of your favorite nature related books and lay them somewhere shady so kids looking for a quiet moment can flip through books outdoors.

Tape Bracelets: A sticky bracelet is a fun way to collect all of the things you find outside in the garden or walking around the neighborhood. Use masking or duct tape to create bracelets.

