

Take a Kid (Young or Old) Outside!

Plant a garden – a garden does not have to be large. A small patch of soil or even a 5 gallon bucket can easily house a tomato plant or a variety of other vegetable plants or flowers! Observe the growth of your garden over the growing season. Keep a journal of how much it grows, what the weather was like each day, how often you water your plant, what insects you find on your plant, how many fruits (the part of the plant that holds the seed!) or flowers your plant produced. Once you have a flower or fruit, dissect one and collect the seeds to start another plant!

Explore a foot – take a ruler and a piece of yarn outside. Measure out one square foot. Using a magnifying glass, some tweezers, or a popsicle stick, search for how many different critters you can find in that small area. Count the different types of plants you find. If you are really adventurous, begin to dig in the soil to look for more critters. Find something that sparks your curiosity? Purchase a field guide on plants or insects or visit your local library to check out a field guide. You can also do searches on the internet.

Take a kid fishing – even if you do not eat the fish, taking the time to slow down and be observant around an area of water is a fun way to spend time outdoors. Ask your child about their day or try different baits to see what catches the most fish. When you catch a fish treat it with respect. Place it in a bucket briefly to examine its gills and eyeballs before tossing it back!

Cloud gaze – lay a blanket down on the ground and look up. What shapes do you find in the sky? Compare the differences you see in each cloud. This is a fun way to demonstrate how people see things differently.

Star gaze – Again, lay a blanket on the ground and look up. See what different shapes you can find by connecting the stars together. Check earthsky.com to learn of upcoming meteor showers and to learn what is visible during each season in your part of the world.

Go for a walk – just walk through the neighborhood. Look for insects along the sidewalk, admire your neighbors pretty flowers, say hello to others out and about. Discuss the day! Look for different colors and shapes with smaller children. Play “I spy” with older children.

Blow bubbles – purchase bubbles from the store or make your own. Blow bubbles and watch them float on the air. Follow them around the yard and watch where they land.

Gently mix 1/2 cup (500 mL) liquid dishwater detergent, 4-1/2 cups (4.5 L) water, and 4 tablespoons glycerin (60 mL) in container. (Glycerin may be purchased at the drugstore)

Play in the rain – as long as there is no thunder or lightening, put on your raincoats (or leave them behind) and go play in the rain! Take a simple walk, observe how the plants and insects react to the rain, or just sit and listen!

After the rain – go puddle stomping! Look through the puddle to see what you can find. Are there any critters? Is it muddy? Can you make a mud pie with soil and water?

Fly a kite - - purchase an inexpensive kite and find an open field to fly it!

Make solar prints – On a sunny day, find various objects that can be laid on construction paper. Lay out rocks, tape leaves or flowers to the paper, cut out your name in a darker piece of paper and lay it on the construction paper. Leave it in the sun for several hours. The sun will fade the exposed paper. When you remove your items, their “print” will be left behind.

Collect leaves - play a matching game. Collect several leaves, flowers, or other objects from your yard and have your children go on a scavenger hunt to collect items to match the ones you have already collected.

Scavenger Hunt – Make a list using pictures or words depending on your child’s age. The list should include various things that can be found on a walk around the neighborhood, the park, the backyard, etc. A long stick, a short stick, an orange flower (have child draw pictures of certain items found when necessary), a green plant, a leaf shaped like an oval, a leaf shaped like a heart, something red, and so on.

Build a fort in the woods – use sticks, leaves, etc to build a fort.

There are endless possibilities for outdoor play with children! Sign your children up for a nature camp or other activity at Cope Environmental Center, your local nature center, or park department.

The following websites have many more ideas!

<http://www.gameskidsplay.net/>

<http://fun.familyeducation.com/outdoor-games/outdoor-activities/33332.html>

<http://childparenting.about.com/cs/summer/a/summerart1.htm>

<http://www.preschoolrainbow.org/preschool-outdoor.htm>

<http://www.familyfun.com>

<http://www.creativekidsathome.com/activities.shtml>