

NATURE ACTIVITIES

SALT DOUGH NATURE ORNAMENTS

Need an activity to connect your children to nature safely while social distancing? This project involves getting outdoors and collecting leaves and natural materials, learning to mix dough, and create artworks. Each leaf or natural material will make an imprint on the salt dough resembling clay. After drying, the children will get to color the prints into their own pieces of art. This project can be accomplished over the course of a few days.

PART ONE - EXPLORE THE OUTDOORS!

Exploring the outdoors is a wonderful thing to do. Spring is coming, the weather is warming up, and the snow has thawed. There are still leaves on the ground and live Rhododendron leaves as well. Twigs of White Pine or Spruce with the needles make great impressions.

Resources/materials needed: Outdoor space, leaves, twigs, pine cones, bark, stones, pine needles, acorns, and other natural materials.

Skills: Cognitive, Motor Skills, Outdoor Appreciation, Responsibility, Respect for others, Hand-eye Coordination, & Plant ID

DIRECTIONS

Step 1: Pick an outdoor space that would be safe for social distancing such as your backyard or a less populated park or trail. Bring bags to collect leaves in as well as gloves, boots and any other outdoor items you may need. Also, be aware of ticks.

Step 2: Instruct children to keep their safe distance from others and get ready to find some leaves and material from the earth for their artworks.



Photo Credit: Easy Peasy and Fun



Photo Credit: Canva



Photo Credit: Pinterest Parent

Guide them to find objects that grab their attention and have an interesting texture. Also, instruct the children to think about shape as well as their experience of color

Be creative! Think of a game you could play with your kids while out in the forest. Maybe a scavenger hunt of who can find an acorn, a pine cone, and an oak leaf. If you know your tree identification or have a field guide handy, teach your children which leaves belong to which tree. After you're finished, bring your findings back to the house and save them for the next part.

Kid's Reflection: What did you experience in the outdoors? Did you enjoy the sensation of the bark or certain rock? Did you notice certain textures? What do you like about the forest?



PART TWO - SALT DOUGH MIXING

Salt Dough is an affordable and easy to make alternative to Playdough and clay for kid's crafts. Allowing your kid's to mix the dough provides a fun sensory experience and a head start to cooking and baking skills. They will learn to measure, how to knead, and roll dough while having a blast!

Resources/materials needed: Flour, Salt, Water, Mixing Bowl, Measuring Cups, Spoons, Kitchen, Rolling Pin, Wax Paper, Baking Sheet, Small Knife, Food Coloring Butter Knife, Cookie Cutter, and Oven

Skills: Cognitive, Motor Skills, Cooking, Responsibility, Respect for others, Hand-eye Coordination, Technical Skills, Measuring

DIRECTIONS:

Step 1: Mix together in a bowl

2 cups all purpose flour

1 cup salt

Add 3/4-1 cup of water gradually

Kid's have a great time mixing and the dough and using their hands. The dough should reach a consistency of not being sticky. It is a bit of a messy project, but very fun! You can add food coloring for colored dough! Use gloves to prevent staining.



Photo Credit: Meaningful Mama



Photo Credit: Canva

Step 2: Prepare a working surface out wax paper or use a baking mat. Sprinkle flour on the surface as you would make cookies. Now it is time to kneed the dough for 2 minutes. This strengthens hand muscles!

Step 3: Roll dough into multiple golf ball or larger sized balls. Flour the surface lightly again as well as the top of the dough balls and roll the dough out with a rolling pin until it is about 1 cm thick or slightly less. Put a straw to make a hole at least 1/4 in from the edge to place string to hang. Do not bake with the plastic straw.

Reflection: Did you enjoy mixing, kneading and rolling the dough? What was challenging? What textures and sensations did you experience? Do you feel better at measuring?

PART THREE - MAKING ORNAMENTS

Bring out the leaves and other collected materials. It is time to start making nature impressions!

Resources/materials needed: Flour, Salt, Water, Mixing Bowl, Measuring Cups, Spoons, Kitchen, Rolling Pin, Wax Paper, Baking Sheet, Small Knife, Butter Knife, Cookie Cutter, and Oven

Skills: Cognitive, Motor Skills, Hand-eye Coordination, Technical Skills and Aesthetics

DIRECTIONS:

Step 1: Place leaf or natural object on the dough and gently push down evenly on the surface. To really make an even and nice impression, use your rolling pin for leaves and other flat objects.

Step 2: Hold the leaf or object down and peel back from the thicker stem to the top (if it's a leaf) If you have another object, lift them off gently.

**If some of the prints don't turn out how you wanted them too, the dough can be balled up and rolled out again. Experiment with different amounts of pressure.*

Step 3: After you have the prints completed, you can choose remove excess dough around them with a butter knife or cookie cutter.

Step 4: Feel free to make other shapes like Christmas trees and stars and decorate them additionally with this project. You can add textures from leaves to them.



Photo Credit: Live Laugh and Learn



Photo Credit: 365 Atlanta Family



Photo Credit: Meaningful Mama



Photo Credit: My Bright Ideas

PART FOUR- BAKING THE DOUGH

Now that you've made your impressions, it's time to bake them so they can become finished artworks! There is another option to air dry in a sunny space for 7 days

Resources/materials needed: Oven, baking sheet, parchment paper, spatula, ornaments, and timer

Skills: Cognitive, Motor Skills, Hand-eye Coordination, Technical Skills and Aesthetics

DIRECTIONS:

Step 1: Preheat the oven to 240 degrees F. Prepare the baking sheet with or without parchment paper. Use a spatula to transfer the Impressions onto the baking sheet.

Step 2: When the oven is preheated, place the cookie sheet inside. Depending on how thick the pieces are, the cooking time can take anywhere from 2-3 hours. Check them periodically. If they are over 1 cm thick, flipping may be necessary. Take out and let cool when done.

PART FIVE- DECORATING!

It's time to bring out the art supplies and add color to your ornaments!

Resources/materials needed: Oven, baking sheet, parchment paper, spatula, ornaments, and timer

Skills: Cognitive, Motor Skills, Hand-eye Coordination, Technical Skills and Aesthetics

DIRECTIONS:

Step 1: Prepare an art making space. Provide any art supplies that you see fit such as colored pencils, crayons, paint, glitter, and ribbon/string to hang the ornament.

Step 2: Encourage the artists to express themselves. When done, hang on your Christmas tree! Have fun!

Reflection: What was your favorite part of the process? Share your favorite finished piece and talk about what you've learned. Hope you had a great time!

Resources:

theimaginationtree.com/coloured-salt-dough-leaf-impressions/
freebiefindingmom.com/easy-fall-leaf-crafts-for-kids/
lovelaughandlearn.co.uk/tag/salt-dough/



Photo Credit: Canva



Photo Credit: My Plum Pudding



Photo Credit: Pini MG



Photo Credit: Play of the Wild

meaningfulmama.com
mybrightideasblog.com/natural-craft-perfect-earthday-activity-super-easy/
myplumpudding.blogspot.com/2008/03/nature-sculpture.html