

TRIED AND TRUE

OUTDOOR LEARNING SUPPLIES AND MATERIALS

Here we share a list of outdoor learning supplies and materials that have been field-tested and shown to happily engage children outdoors.

Safety and Appropriate Use Notes:

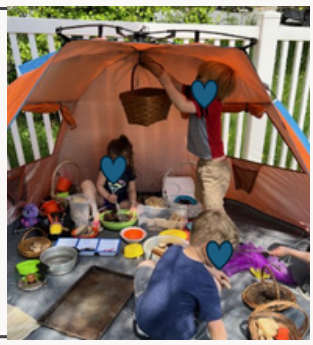
- The items listed are recommendations only. Always use your best judgment to ensure age-appropriateness and safety with each item.
- Carefully assess items for defects before using, and regularly check all materials for wear and tear.
- As always, appropriate supervision is necessary. When introducing new items, we recommend increased supervision as you observe how children use the items.
- For certain items (for example, metal digging tools) that may be new to your program, consider writing a benefit-risk assessment* to establish staff-accepted, consistent guidelines for safe use.
- Live links are included to see examples of specific items, but we encourage you to shop around and find what works best for your program.

*For assistance in writing benefit-risk assessments, or for any questions about Nature-based ECE supplies, please contact:

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Community Connections for Children/ELRC 8, 9 & 10

SMALL POP-UP BEACH TENT

For shade as well as socio-dramatic play. Note: do not place tent against a hard wall as children may run into tent and not be aware of an adjacent wall. Tent may need to be anchored. Do not use in windy conditions.



BALANCE BEAM

Buildable, movable balance beam (best kept on grass so it doesn't chip/splinter)



DIGGING TOOLS

Digging is an ideal "heavy work" nature play activity that helps develop children's proprioceptive sensory system. To get the most benefit, children need shovels that will not break when they apply pressure. With pre-planning with a benefit risk assessment and established safety practices, metal diggers and shovels can be used. For hand digging, ice cream scoops (either sturdy plastic or metal, use your best judgment for your program) and food service scoops may offer more success and "heavy work" than a flimsy plastic hand shovel. (*here is a link for stainless scoops).



BUCKETS

Offer a variety of buckets made of different materials and in many different sizes (here is a link for stainless buckets). As always, look for sturdy, durable products.



TONGS

Children love tongs and will work hard to master using them. These are also easy to find at a thrift store.



TUFF TRAYS

Why we love tuff trays:

- They provide a defined space for engaging sensory and/or messy nature play experiences for children
- They are easy to set up and clean up
- Play invitations can be rotated regularly, capturing children's interest and engagement
- When used on a stand, provides a place for early walkers to stand and move around the table to play and explore
- They offer many benefits to children: creativity, language development, social-emotional learning, communication, fine motor skills practice, etc.
- Learn more here





MULTICOLORED PLAYSILKS

Approx. 24"x24", to use as a loose part, or to attach to a stick so children can run with them and hold them in the wind.



OUTDOOR BLOCKS

Use donated/free chunks of wood from carpentry projects. Sand edges for safety. If possible, place outdoor blocks on a firm building surface, such as a sidewalk or deck.



GRAB AND GO BOXES

When creating systems for spending extended time outdoors, we recommend creating "grab and go boxes". Start with a sturdy, lidded, and waterproof bin (like these plastic totes) and fill with all the materials/supplies you need for a specific invitation to play, create and learn. When heading outside with your class, you can simply grab the box you want and set it up when you get outside. Consider adding a tarp or outdoor blanket to contain the materials, or small cones to add a visual boundary around the area so that playthings stay in one area as much as possible.

Below we have shared some of our favorite grab and go box ideas. To create your own, simply observe what children are interested in and create a box of materials that includes everything you need to create engaging play and creativity invitations for children.

FORT/DEN BUILDING BOX

Prepare a lidded container with a variety of colorful sheer curtains (they can be purchased in a set), along with a variety of clips such as clothespins, "alligator" clips and other clips to attach sheer curtains to structures for fort/den play. The sheer curtains feel like an enclosure to children but teachers can still see children through the sheers.



ART BOX

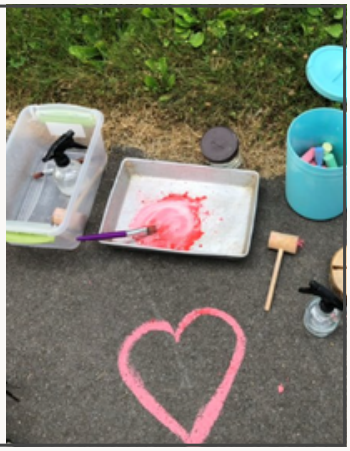
Prepare a lidded bin, add a tarp (to create visual boundary for the activity), tempera "cake" paints (easy to set up and clean up; put each "cake" in a small yogurt container with a brush, or purchase color coded clear paint cups that have same color lid and brush so children keep colors separate), a low, wide container or tray to hold individual paints (so children know where to put them back when they are done), 5-6 clipboards, paper (enough for the day), a small container of water to wet tempera paints and rinse brushes, paper towels and/or hand wipes. To set up, put down the tarp, add paper to each clipboard and set around the perimeter of the tarp. Put rimmed tray in the middle with paints and brushes. To manage wet paintings: include string and clothespins in the box. Find a safe place to hang the string, and encourage children to use clothespins to hang their signed artwork to dry and pick up later. This also prevents art work from blowing away.





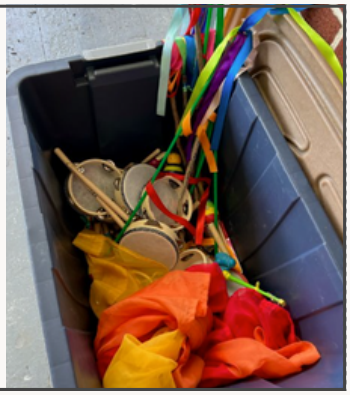
CHALK BOX

Prepare a lidded bin with sidewalk chalk, small wooden mallets ("crab" mallets, for crushing chalk), bowls, spoons and paintbrushes of a variety of sizes. Include a lidded container or squirt bottle of water so children can add water to make paint (teacher support may be needed for this step)



MUSIC AND "PARADE" BOX

A large, covered, weatherproof bin with play silks, sticks with colorful ribbons tied on the ends, and a variety of musical instruments such as tambourines, maracas, bells, etc. Consider adding simple dress up materials as well.



"INVESTIGATION STATION"/NATURE STUDY BOX

Prepare a lidded bin with a small tarp or ground cloth (to lay all materials on, to keep them together), magnifying glasses, and a variety of nature finds that children may be interested in, such as: fossils, insects (ones that have been discovered dead) in a clear plastic jar (empty, clean, Talenti gelato containers are ideal), cleaned bones from animals, turtle shells, leaves, sticks, cicada shells or other items that children, teachers, or their families have found in nature. Their curiosity is the basis for scientific inquiry.



PRE-LITERACY/PRE-MATH BOX

Prepare a lidded bin with a large tarp or outdoor blanket. Add books, literacy materials such as each letter of the alphabet drawn or painted on river stones or small “wood cookies”, a set of traceable alphabet cards, etc. Add pre-math materials such as numerals drawn or painted on river stones or “wood cookies”, rulers, child-safe measuring tapes, etc. Vinyl placemats cut and labeled with numbers or letters offer an invitation to match quanity to numeral or beginning sounds.



NATURE & SCIENCE LEARNING/PRE-LITERACY

Prepare a lidded bin with a large tarp or outdoor blanket. Add a selection of PA field guides, nature (and other) books, a set of PA “nature cards” (laminated photos of animals, birds, mammals that live in PA), literacy materials such as each letter of the alphabet drawn or painted on small “wood cookies”, a set of traceable alphabet cards, numerals drawn or painted on “wood cookies”, rulers, child-safe measuring tapes.



FEATHER KITE BOX

Prepare a lidded bin with string or colorful embroidery floss, a small pair of child scissors, colorful feathers, and sticks cut to approximately 14-16". Label the bin “feather kites” and when children want one, they can ask a teacher. Older children may be able to make their own. Another option is to tie 24" colorful silks to the ends of sticks. Feather “kites” inspire movement, play and exploration/inquiry about wind.



SMALL WORLD PLAY BOXES

Nature invites enchanting opportunities for small world play. Fill a lidded box with a variety of dinosaurs, rocks, wooden trees, wood cookies, etc. so children can create a dinosaur habitat. Another option is a small world play invitation to create fairy or gnome houses using sticks, leaves, rocks, gems, small tiles leftover from tiling projects, etc. Children may naturally incorporate items they find in nature, such as dandelions, clover, and pine cones.

