

Design for Learning: The Outdoor Play Environment

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MISSISSIPPI
DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

Office of Early Childhood



VISION

To create a world-class educational system that gives students the knowledge and skills to be successful in college and the workforce, and to flourish as parents and citizens

MISSION

To provide leadership through the development of policy and accountability systems so that all students are prepared to compete in the global community





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ALL Students Proficient and Showing Growth in All Assessed Areas



2

EVERY Student Graduates from High School and is Ready for College and Career



3

EVERY Child Has Access to a High-Quality Early Childhood Program

EVERY School Has Effective Teachers and Leaders

4



EVERY Community Effectively Uses a World-Class Data System to Improve Student Outcomes

5



EVERY School and District is Rated "C" or Higher

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Activity 1: Picture it!

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Picture it..... Imagine that you have just been awarded a grant for creating a learning environment that you can design all on your own.....

What would it look like?



First things First.....can it be done?

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- Learning through play outdoors!
- What a hassle?
- Can it even be done like realistically?

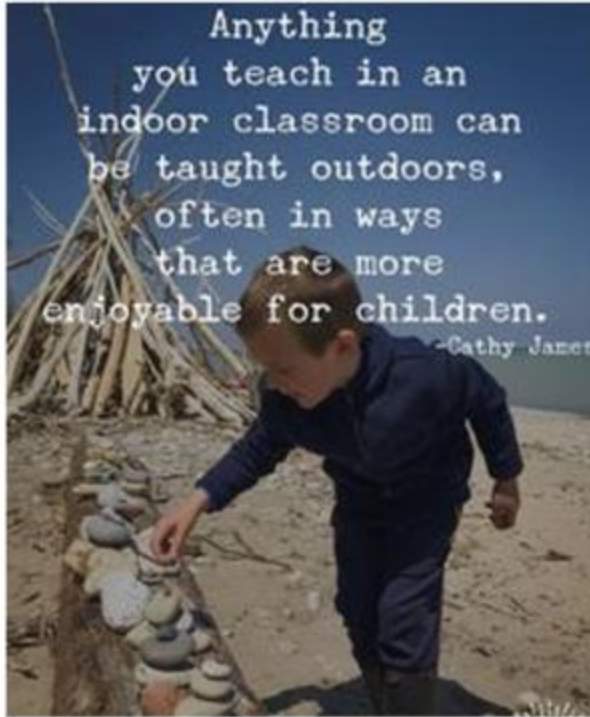
The answer is yes!

There are programs around the U.S. that are “no walls” childcare centers. They do everything a regular childcare center does. They play, teach learning standards, eat and some even sleep outside daily.



Are we suggesting this way of life for your classroom....No!

We can take materials out to offer safe play spaces during this pandemic or anytime.



According to a study published by the Natural Start Alliance, the U.S. saw a 66% increase in the number of registered outdoor preschools and kindergartens between 2016-2017.

Currently there are about 585 schools across the U.S. that are nature-based programs!

<https://www.rei.com/blog/news/are-outdoor-preschools-the-wave-of-the-future>

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/breaking/ct-early-childhood-nature-schools-pandemic-20200925-32nr6tef7vgq5nq7haloxeunde-story.html>

What does research say?

- Increases school performance
- Increases standardized test scores
- Enhances attitude about school and about learning
- Increases students physical, mental and social health
- Increases in a greater range of intelligences



Activity 2: Let's Chat and Share in the Box

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1. Do you offer learning opportunities outside?
2. Do you offer or set up any learning spaces outside (blocks, music, dramatic play, etc.....)
3. How can we do this successfully? What are the logistics of offering these items outdoors?
4. Any great ideas that you would like to share with the group?



Outdoor learning spaces and storage ideas:

- Shed
- Plastic containers
- Shower caddy
- Pencil boxes
- Dish drying rack
- Buckets or pails
- Party platter with sections for sorting
- Measuring cups and plastic beakers
- Bookbags
- Wagons/Containers with wheels





- Develop reflective and inquisitive thinking along with problem solving skills
- Allow children to identify hazards and risks
- Develop a love, appreciation and respect for nature and all that is living
- Provide positive health benefits
- Build self-awareness, confidence and self-esteem
- Develop collaborative process
- Foster a lifelong love of the outdoors



Health and Safety Precautions

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- Be prepared
- If possible, provide individual basins of water or other sensory materials
- Children should wash hands before and after use of materials
- Set up handwashing stations or germ-x stations outside so that children have many opportunities for washing and sanitizing their hands
- Limit the number of children in each area
- Space learning centers so that children are not within close-proximity of each other





Writing Development and Visual Arts Outdoors

Outdoor writing materials:

- Sidewalk chalk
- Plastic/foam/ or magnetic letters
- Letters on rocks or written on leaves
- Individual white boards or chalk boards
- Clip boards or small note pads
- Crayons/markers/pens/pencils
- Window markers
- Ink pads and stamps















































Provide Opportunities for Writing Outside

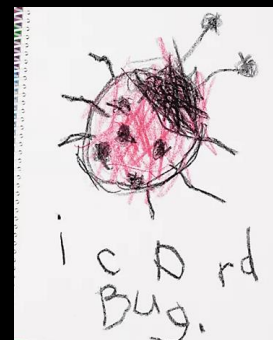
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Writing and Classification Journals

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I can write about...				
People	Places	Things	To do	
mother 	park 	cat 	go 	
father 	beach 	dog 	walk 	
brother 	zoo 	pizza 	run 	
sister 	woods 	flowers 	swim 	
friend 	store 	bus 	jump 	
teacher 	school 	car 	ride 	
girl 	home 	truck 	play 	
boy 	farm 	doll 	cook 	
baby 	barn 	bed 	drive 	
man 	city 	bike 	read 	
woman 	Texas 	ball 	draw 	

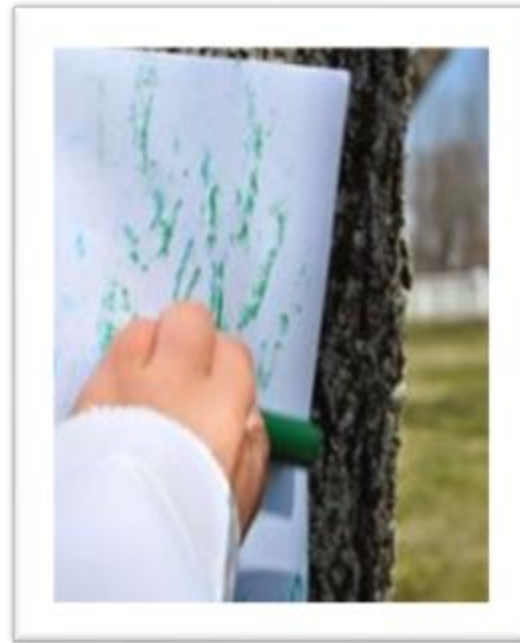


Outdoor Creative arts materials:

- Sidewalk chalk
- Natural items collections (leaves, sticks, seeds, etc....)
- Individual white boards or chalk boards
- Water, brushes and spray bottles
- Clip boards
- Markers/pens/pencils
- Loose parts items for creating sculptures
- Craft items/junk items
- Easels and a variety of paints











Why did you choose to use those colors?

Can you tell me about your painting?



Advanced Vocabulary:
Plein Air Painting- the action of painting outdoors





Five Reasons to use natural materials:

1. Natural materials are free
2. Notice the small details
3. Develop botanical vocabulary and plant knowledge
4. Teach children to respect and enjoy nature
5. Inspire creativity





Outdoor Reading and Literacy Areas

Outdoor reading and literacy materials:

- Magnetic story props
- Cookie sheets and magnetic letters
- Puppets/ reading buddies
- Books and props
- Small stadium cushions, blankets or towels to sit on
- Display books (plate holder, plant hanger and basket, dish drying rack, or a small easel)

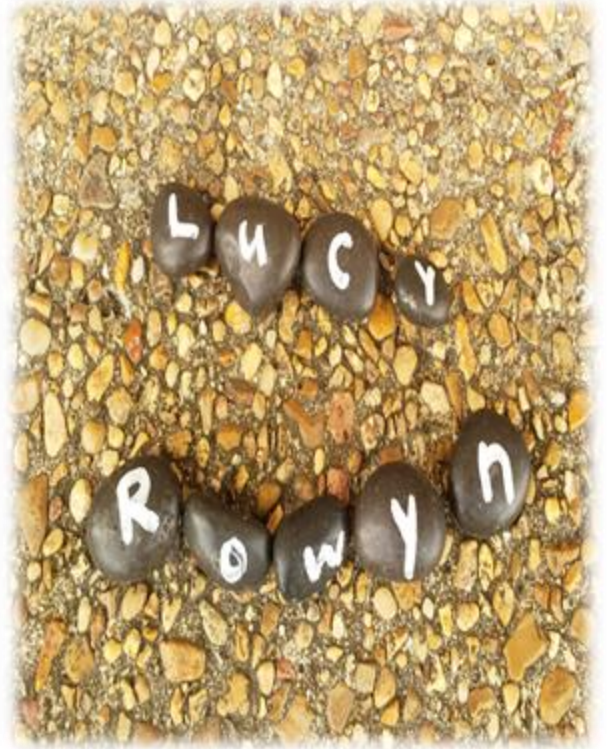




Outdoor Print-Rich Experiences

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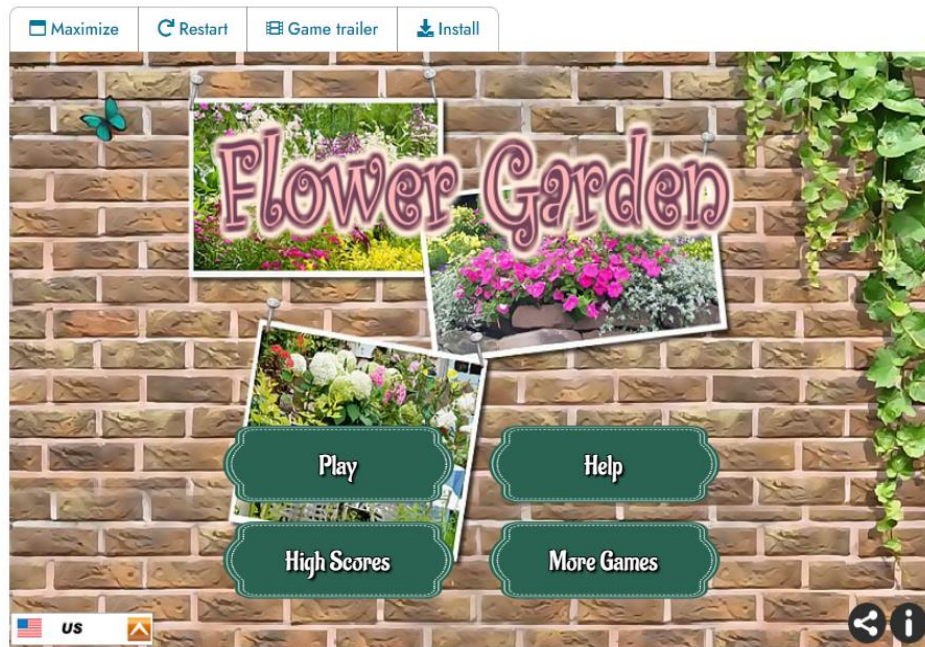






Activity Time: Hidden Alphabet

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<https://www.hiddenobjectgames.com/game/Flower+Garden>



Math and Fine Motor Outdoor Play

Outdoor math/fine motor materials:

- Plastic counters (animals, bears, etc....)
- Rocks, leaves, sticks and other natural collections
- Individual white boards or chalk boards
- Writing materials
- Magnetic, plastic or foam numbers or shapes
- Cookie sheets/divider trays for sorting
- Pool noodles slices
- Weight scale/ tape measure/ rope
- Laminated playing cards/shape cards





DIY Outdoor Scale and Items to Weigh

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Science and Sensory Exploration Outdoors

Outdoor science materials:

















- Plastic counters (animals, insects, etc....)
- Books with realistic science pictures
- Rocks, leaves, sticks and other natural collections
- Individual white boards or memo pads
- Ink pads and use natural items as stamps/rubbings
- Magnets and cookie sheets
- Magnifying glasses
- Measuring cups and plastic beakers





DOING GOOD TOGETHER. NATURE SCAVENGER HUNT
HOW MANY TREASURES CAN YOU FIND?

Directions: As you discover each item, color in the picture or draw/write what you found in the box. Feel free to take photos of your discoveries, but leave these treasures where you found them so others may enjoy them too.

 BUG	 FLOWER	 SOMETHING SURPRISING	 NEST
 ANIMAL TRACKS	 PINECONE	 FALLEN BRANCH	 WORM
 BIRD	 THREE DIFFERENT KINDS OF TREES	 WATER	 SOMETHING COLORFUL
 SEED	 SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL	 THREE DIFFERENT KINDS OF ROCKS	 SQUIRREL

What else did you find? Write or draw on item you found interesting that wasn't on this list:

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What Melts in the Sun?



Weather and Wind Station

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Items to include:

- Sundial
- Rain Gauge
- Outdoor thermometer
- Weathervane
- Ribbons and windmills
- Chalkboard with chalk to document findings

I notice....

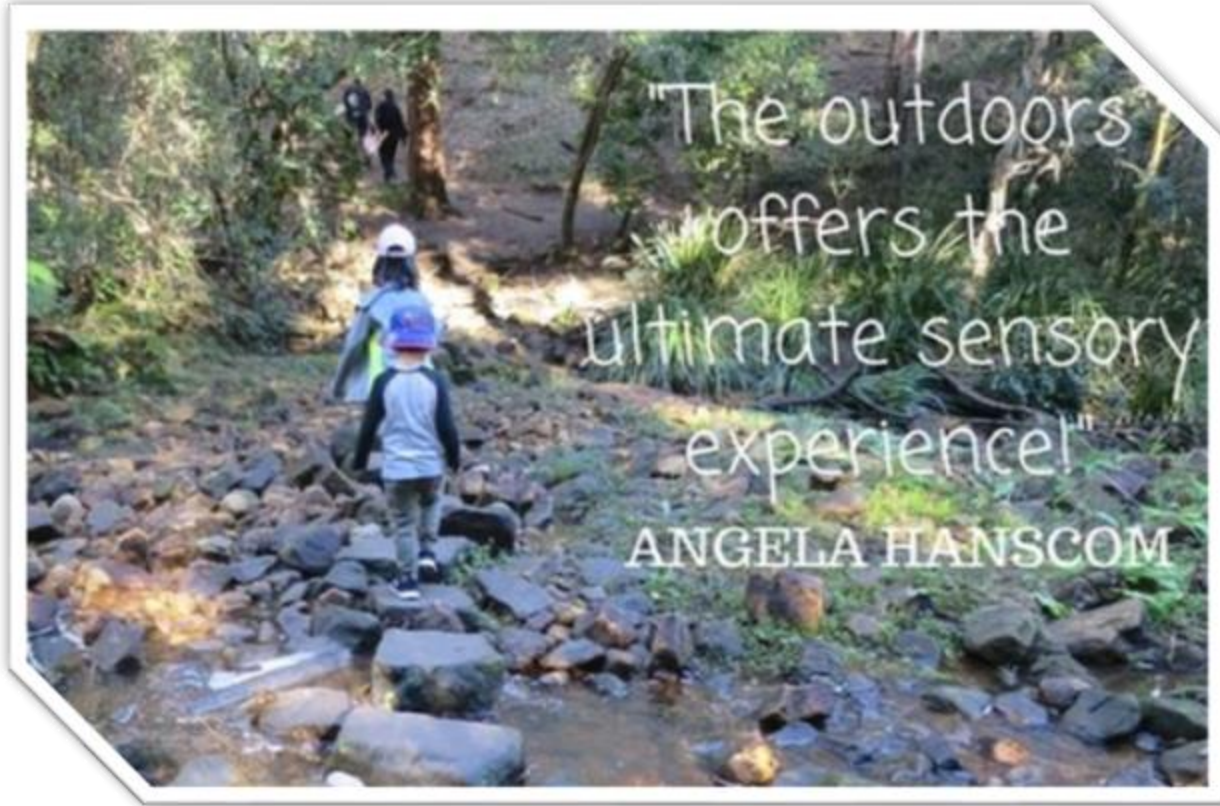


It reminds me
of...



I wonder....











Dramatic Play Outdoors

Outdoor dramatic play materials:

- Plastic dramatic play animals or dolls
- Plastic trays for children to use to create small worlds and props to use
- Cookie sheets, old pots and pans or trays
- Measuring cups, and containers
- Play food and a few plastic dishes
- Play furniture or cardboard box furniture
- Writing materials, memo pads and menus





DIY Dramatic Play Prop Ideas

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Let's brainstorm.
What should we pack
for a picnic outdoors?
items



After the picnic what
are some activities
you and your family
would enjoy doing at
the park?





Blocks and Building Outdoors

Outdoor block and building materials:

- Plastic wipe boxes for cheap sturdy blocks
- Rocks, leaves, sticks and other natural collections to use as accessories
- Tree wood slices/ scrap wood
- PVC pipe pieces
- Wooden blocks and ramps
- Cardboard tubes
- Small cars and trucks
- Plastic people or animals
- Other items to enhance block play (loose parts materials)





Promoting Language During Block Play

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Can you tell me how those work? Explain to me how you use them.



What would a family home look like? Tell me about who lives there.



Tell me about your structure.





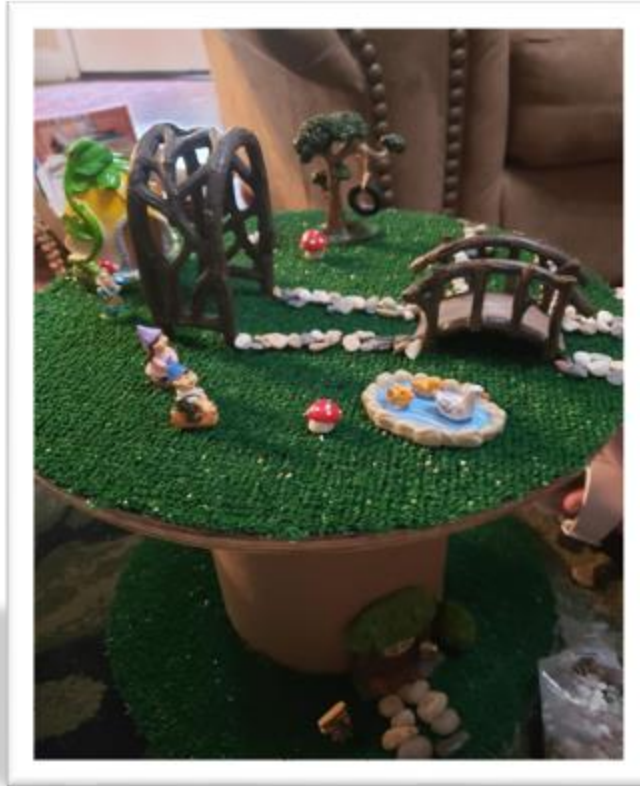
Additional Learning Centers Outdoors





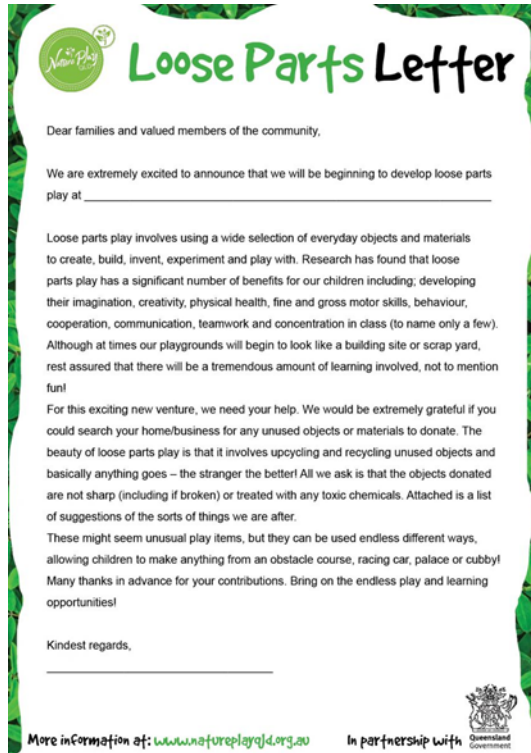
Create Small Worlds and Fairy Gardens

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What are some ways that we can involve our families and/or the community?

Please share ideas in the chat box!



Loose Parts Letter

Dear families and valued members of the community,

We are extremely excited to announce that we will be beginning to develop loose parts play at _____


Loose parts play involves using a wide selection of everyday objects and materials to create, build, invent, experiment and play with. Research has found that loose parts play has a significant number of benefits for our children including; developing their imagination, creativity, physical health, fine and gross motor skills, behaviour, cooperation, communication, teamwork and concentration in class (to name only a few). Although at times our playgrounds will begin to look like a building site or scrap yard, rest assured that there will be a tremendous amount of learning involved, not to mention fun!

For this exciting new venture, we need your help. We would be extremely grateful if you could search your home/business for any unused objects or materials to donate. The beauty of loose parts play is that it involves upcycling and recycling unused objects and basically anything goes – the stranger the better! All we ask is that the objects donated are not sharp (including if broken) or treated with any toxic chemicals. Attached is a list of suggestions of the sorts of things we are after.

These might seem unusual play items, but they can be used endless different ways, allowing children to make anything from an obstacle course, racing car, palace or cubby!

Many thanks in advance for your contributions. Bring on the endless play and learning opportunities!

Kindest regards,

More information at: www.natureplayqld.org.au In partnership with 



Loose Parts Wish List

Here is a list of the sort of items that can be used in a loose parts pit. These might seem unusual play items, but they can be used endless different ways, allowing children to make anything from an obstacle course, racing car, palace or cubby!

NATURAL	<input type="checkbox"/> Branches/leaves
<input type="checkbox"/> Sticks – various sizes	<input type="checkbox"/> Sand
<input type="checkbox"/> Tree stumps	<input type="checkbox"/> Grit
<input type="checkbox"/> Longer large logs for balancing and climbing	<input type="checkbox"/> Seedpods
<input type="checkbox"/> Stones/rocks, pebbles of varying textures and sizes	<input type="checkbox"/> Mud/ mud kitchen
<input type="checkbox"/> Pine cones	<input type="checkbox"/> Water
<input type="checkbox"/> Bamboo in whole pieces or sliced in half and hollowed out to make tunnels	<input type="checkbox"/> Seeds
	<input type="checkbox"/> Bark: paperbark or palm bark 'branches'
	<input type="checkbox"/> Haybales/ straw
	<input type="checkbox"/> Ochre for painting
OTHER	<input type="checkbox"/> Buckets
<input type="checkbox"/> Tyres	<input type="checkbox"/> Mortar and pestle
<input type="checkbox"/> Crates	<input type="checkbox"/> Giggling equipment
<input type="checkbox"/> Ropes	<input type="checkbox"/> Baskets
<input type="checkbox"/> Tarps and pegs	<input type="checkbox"/> Watering cans
<input type="checkbox"/> Fabric – curtains, sheets	<input type="checkbox"/> Pool noodles
<input type="checkbox"/> Ribbon/wool to weave	<input type="checkbox"/> Bags
<input type="checkbox"/> Pipes/ hose pipes	<input type="checkbox"/> Clothing – e.g. fluoro vests, hard hats, crowns
<input type="checkbox"/> Funnels	<input type="checkbox"/> Small World toys – dinosaurs, fairy doors, small action figures, animals
<input type="checkbox"/> Guttering	<input type="checkbox"/> Recycled containers – milk bottles, foil dishes
<input type="checkbox"/> Pallets	<input type="checkbox"/> Black/whiteboards and chalk/pens
<input type="checkbox"/> Plant pots	<input type="checkbox"/> Wheels – e.g. bike, scooter
<input type="checkbox"/> Kitchenware – e.g. pots, pans, cake tins, spoons, sieves	<input type="checkbox"/> Small trucks and vehicles
<input type="checkbox"/> Cardboard	<input type="checkbox"/> Paint brushes
<input type="checkbox"/> Bricks and blocks – foam, real, plastic	<input type="checkbox"/> Random interesting objects!
<input type="checkbox"/> Pulleys	

More information at: www.natureplayqld.org.au In partnership with 

Just imagine....the learning that takes place

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- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-childcare.html>
- <https://tinytrees.org/2015/07/22/nap-time-at-an-outdoor-preschool/>
- <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2018/04/early-childhood-outdoor-education/558959/>
- <http://exploringtheoutdoorclassroom.blogspot.com/2011/11/dramatic-play-ideas-outdoors.html#:~:text=The%20benefit%20of%20providing%20dramatic,structure%2C%20bikes%2C%20or%20sandbox!>
- <https://youtu.be/MDI5T51zhh0>
- <https://www.theempowerededucatoronline.com/2017/06/dramatic-play-outside-ideas.html/>
- <https://www.thecrafttrain.com/easy-glitter-sponge-cakes-for-pretend-play/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bTM3JILh0u4>
- <https://www.natureplayqld.org.au/loose-parts-play>



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