

PRESCHOOLERS:

- A place for cognitive and gross / fine motor development, science learning, and dramatic play (e.g. building, sorting, measuring, digging, climbing, observation, experimenting)
- Loose Parts
- Magical Hideaways (hidey-holes) e.g. "hidden" spots - like in tall plants or under a weeping tree
- Make a fairy village
- Build a sand pit

SCHOOL-AGED KIDS:

- Spaces for deeper nature exploration, gross motor play, games in open areas, and places to get away

School-aged kids continued...

- Make an insect hotel
- Learn about wild edibles growing in your yard
- Build a bird house and watch the birds using it
- Plan time for nature play as if it were a piano lesson or after-school sport

RESOURCES:

- *Balanced and Barefoot*
By Angela J. Hanscom
- *Nature Play at Home*
By Nancy Striniste
- childrenandnature.org
- nwf.org

Seven Ponds Nature Center
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WHAT IS NATURE PLAY?

Unstructured, free play in a wild area (backyard, park, puddle, garden, tree...) that is child-led



WHY ARE CHILDREN SPENDING LESS TIME OUTSIDE?

- *Technology*
- *Urbanization - 80% of Americans live in city areas - fewer wild places close to home*
- *Parental fears*
- *Daily lives are overscheduled*



WHY IS NATURE PLAY IMPORTANT?

There is mounting scientific evidence showing a correlation between the time a child spends outside playing to the child's mental and physical health.

- *Nature Play increases a child's confidence*
- *Nature Play promotes imagination and creativity*
- *Nature teaches responsibility*
- *Nature Play helps develop a sense of wonderment*
- *Time in nature improves moods and reduces stress, lowering depression and hyperactivity*
- *Time outside = more vitamin D, lower risk of developing health problems*
- *Improved eyesight*
- *Kids sleep better after spending time outside - lots of running, climbing, and playing outside helps reset a child's natural sleep rhythms.*

WHAT CAN WE DO AT HOME?

INFANTS:

- *Find a comfortable place in nature (e.g. garden) with lots of colors, textures, sounds, and smells for you and baby to explore together*
- *Loose Parts (twigs, bark, rocks, pinecones, seed pods, flowers, shells) for touching new things*
- *Tummy time outdoors*
- *Napping outdoors*
- *Holding baby while you walk outdoors*

TODDLERS:

- *A space to start independent exploration (e.g. moving objects from place to place, walking, balancing, sensory exploration)*



- *Loose Parts (flat stones (to stack), stainless steel bowls and scoops, branches and logs)*

- *Play in the mud*
- *Play in the rain*
- *Picnic in the park*