

# Nature Play



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**Nature play** is any freely chosen activity that involves children playing outdoors and connecting with nature; whether it’s on the beach, in the woods, at the park, or in your garden. This resource includes activities that can only be done outside, as well as crafts and games that use natural materials.

Playing in nature boosts **self-esteem** and **confidence**, inspires **creativity**, and spending time outdoors makes people **happier**.

**Nature play** can offer unique and fun ways for children to exercise, and learning about the world around them can foster an interest in science.





# Spring

Spring is the season of revival. Flowers bloom, trees blossom, baby animals are born, and bees are buzzing. It can be quite a rainy season too, so it's a perfect time to get outside and play in puddles.

## Create a daisy chain

### What you need

- Picked daisies.

### What to do

1. Using your thumbnail, create a small vertical slit near the bottom of a daisy stem.
2. Thread the next daisy through this slit.
3. Repeat the process until the chain is the desired length.
4. Once it's long enough, create a larger slit in the last daisy and thread the head of the first daisy through the hole.

**Why not make a bracelet, necklace, or a crown?**

## Decorate a stick wand/staff/sword

### What you need

- A stick.
- A knife (With adult supervision)
- Sandpaper
- Paint
- Any other craft supplies (feathers, glitter, etc)

### What to do

1. Pick a stick.
2. Adults supervise as the child scrapes the bark off with the knife and carves the wood as desired.
3. Use sandpaper to sand the stick and remove splinters, and then paint and decorate.

## Grow cress heads

### What you need

- Cress seeds
- Paper towel
- Cotton wool
- Eggshells/yoghurt pots
- Craft supplies (paint, pens, etc)

### What to do

1. Decorate your eggshell/yoghurt pot.
2. Wet a sheet of paper towel and place it at the bottom of the head, then place wet cotton wool on top of that.
3. Leave a 3cm gap from the top.
4. Sprinkle a teaspoon of cress seeds on top and gently press into the wool.
5. Place in a warm, bright place and wait for your cress to grow!
6. Keep the wool damp until the seeds have grown enough for you to eat.



## Press flowers

### What you need

- Dry flowers
- Newspaper/baking paper
- Sturdy book, e.g., hardback or phone book
- Heavy weight

### What to do

1. Place a piece of paper inside your book.
2. Arrange your flowers on the paper, keeping about 2cm distance from each other. Make sure the flowers are of a similar thickness.
3. Cover the flowers with another piece of paper, and close the book.
4. Place something heavy on top of the book.
5. Wait 2-4 weeks for your flowers to dry out.
6. If using newspaper, change the paper every few days to prevent the flowers/paper from getting mouldy.

# Summer

Summer is a season of sun, sand, and sea. The summer holidays offer children near complete freedom to play, and the long days provide plenty of time to play outdoors. Remember to use suncream and drink plenty of water to stay safe in the sun!

## Learn to skip pebbles

### What you need

- Flat, light pebbles
- A calm body of water

### What to do

1. Hold your pebble with your thumb on top and middle finger on the bottom, with your index finger along the edge.
2. Face the water at an angle with your knees slightly bent and your throwing arm behind you, with your elbow at your side.
3. Bend your wrist back, whip your arm forward, and let go, keeping the flat side of the stone parallel to the water.
4. Try to flick your wrist to give the pebble a spin as you release it.

**Keep trying and see how many times you can make it skip!**

## Build sandcastles

### What you need

- Damp sand
- Spade
- Bucket
- Seashells/stones/seaweed to decorate

### What to do

1. Start building your castle on damp sand away from the shoreline. If the sand is too dry, add water.
2. Using your hands or your spade, fill your bucket with sand until it's full. Quickly flip the bucket and place flat on the sand.
3. Hit the top of the bucket with your spade to make sure the sand hasn't stuck to the bucket, then carefully lift the bucket off to reveal your castle.

**You can also build a moat around your castle and decorate using whatever you find on the beach.**

## Climb trees

### What you need

- A suitable tree

### What to do

1. Choose a sturdy tree with a branch low enough for you to either step up or reach.
2. Keep close to the trunk of the tree, and grip branches near the trunk.
3. Use your legs to push yourself up. Make sure to only climb as high as you're comfortable with!

**Adults:** children are very good at judging risk for themselves, you can help by asking questions like – do you feel safe and strong? Do you need a rest? Notice how that branch is thinner than the others; do you feel stable there?



## Build a cairn

### What you need

- Flat rocks

### What to do

1. Choose either a large, flat stone, or an even area of ground, to start building.
2. Place your flat rocks on top of each other, building a tower as tall as you can!
3. Add smaller pebbles in the gaps to give it more support.

## Paint rocks

### What you need

- Rocks/pebbles
- Pencil
- Paint
- Paintbrush/stamp/sponge

### What to do

1. Wash and dry your stones.
2. Sketch out a design using your pencil- it could be a building, a human, a bug, a car, whatever you'd like- and then paint.

**Use them as decorations, toys, or place them around your neighbourhood.**

# Autumn

Autumn is the season of kicking through fiery fallen leaves, carving pumpkins and dressing up for Halloween, and wrapping up warm to go to bonfires and watch fireworks on Guy Fawkes' Night. Wild animals are preparing for winter, so this is the perfect season to engage children in local Scottish wildlife. Look out for toadstools and migrating birds!

## Build a bug hotel

### What you need

- Logs/sticks
- Leaves
- Pinecones
- Rocks/slate
- Bark
- Wooden boxes/boards
- Bricks/large rocks

### What to do

1. Choose an area in a green space that is level and solid.
2. First, create the basic structure of the hotel by using bricks and old wooden boards or palettes, leaving enough space for bugs to enter.
3. Fill in the gaps with leaves, twigs, rocks, bark, and any other natural material you can get your hands on!
4. Once your hotel is complete, place some slate tiles or wooden boards over the top to create a roof.

## Make a bird feeder

### What you need

- Orange
- Knife
- Spoon
- String
- Bird seeds

### What to do

1. Adults can supervise as the child cuts the orange in half, scoops the pulp out of the orange peel and creates holes in either side of the orange with the knife.
2. Feed a length of string through the holes and tie the ends together.
3. Fill the peel with bird seed and hang your feeder in your garden, on your windowsill, or in a local green space.

## Create leaf rubbings

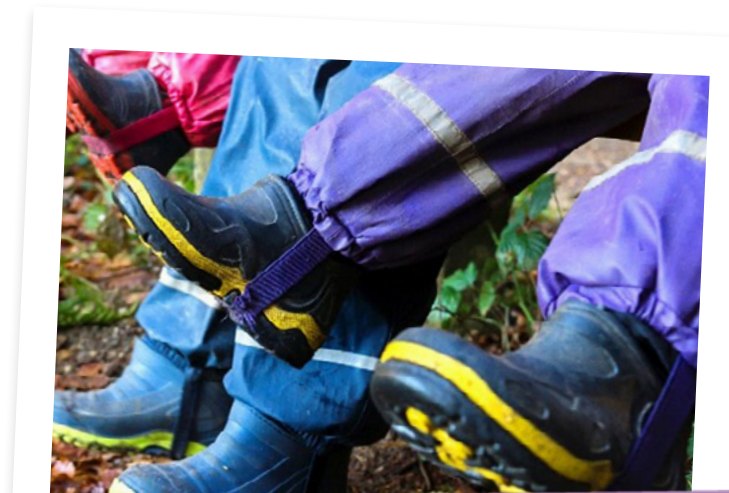
### What you need

- Leaves
- Paper
- Crayons

### What to do

1. Collect as many leaves as you want, and as many types as you want.
2. Place them on a flat surface one at a time with the bottom veiny side facing up.
3. Place a sheet of paper over the top.
4. Gently colour over the top of the leaf with your crayons, and you should see the leaf take shape as you colour.
5. Keep going until you've coloured the whole leaf, then repeat with the other leaves.

**You can keep the shapes separate, or position your leaves to overlap each other in different colours!**



## Play conkers

### What you need

- Conkers
- Drill/hole-borer
- String

### What to do

1. You need to prepare your conkers before you play: an adult helps the child drill a hole through the conkers you find, and then feed some string through and tie it.
2. The two competitors stand 1 meter apart from each other, both holding their conker.
3. Toss a coin, and the winner gets to decide who goes first.
4. The striker gets three turns to smash the other's conker before the other player gets to try.
5. The first person to smash the other's conker wins!



# Winter

Animals are hibernating, trees are bare, and the world stands still during the peace that winter brings. Short days bring starry nights, and the puddles you played in during warmer months freeze and become fun to break. Frost lightly covers morning grass and crunches under your feet. If you're lucky, snowfall brings opportunities for sledding, snowmen, and snowball fights.

## Build a snowman

### What you need

- Snow
- Stones
- Sticks
- Carrot
- Hat/Scarf (optional)

### What to do

1. Find an area with a lot of undisturbed snow, big enough to roll your snowman.
2. Start by creating a small snowball, and roll that snowball around in the snow so it keeps picking up more snow and gets bigger.
3. Once it's big enough, roll out two more snowballs, each smaller than the last.
4. Carefully place each snowball on top of the first one.
5. Use sticks for the snowman's arms, stones for its eyes and mouth, a carrot for its nose, and add a hat and scarf if you'd like!

## Make snow angels

### What you need

- Snow

### What to do

1. Find a patch of ground big enough for you to lie down in the snow.
2. Carefully fall backward into the snow, with your arms reached out to your side, landing in a T shape.
3. Move your arms and legs like you're doing star jumps to create the shape in the snow, then stand back up, being careful not to step on your angel.

## Play pooh sticks

### What you need

- A bridge over a river (avoid road bridges)
- Sticks

### What to do

1. Watch the river to figure out which way it's flowing.
2. Stand on the side of the bridge facing upstream, and reach out so that your stick is over the water.
3. Once everyone is ready, count down and drop your sticks into the water, and quickly go to the other side of the bridge to see which stick wins the race.



## Create frozen suncatchers

### What you need

- A container to freeze your suncatcher in: plates, lids, etc.
- Water
- Leaves, flowers, berries, acorns, twigs, pinecones, etc
- String/ribbon

### What to do

1. Collect any natural materials you can find, using a variety of colours and shapes.
2. Fill a shallow container with water and lay out your chosen items.
3. Place a tied loop of string or ribbon, with half of it laying outside the water, so that you can hang it up if desired.
4. Freeze your suncatchers outside if cold enough, or place in the freezer, making sure not to disturb the design.
5. Once they're frozen, hang from a branch, place on the windowsill, or place somewhere else outdoors where it'll catch the light.





Play Scotland  
4th Floor Hopetoun Gate  
8B McDonald Road, Edinburgh  
EH7 4LZ  
[info@playscotland.org](mailto:info@playscotland.org)

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