

Nature Play: Get Crafty with Nature



Connect with nature and engage your creative side. Let nature be your artistic inspiration and your craft materials as you complete various nature craft activities.

Age: Families with children 5 and older

Gather your Gear

- Play clothes
- Reusable bag to collect items
- String, thread, or yarn
- Tape
- Crayons and paper
- Non-toxic paint (shades of brown and green)
- Paint brushes
- Paper plate
- Canvas, cardstock, poster board, or cardboard

Get Ready *Get your child thinking about the activity before you head outside; this will help create connections during and after your exploration time.*

Pick a place outdoors to explore. Discuss where to find the best nature materials.

What type of materials do you think we will find?

Discuss what nature materials will be helpful for each of the three different crafts.

Explore *Go outside in your yard or your local park and explore.*

Go on an exploration walk through your neighborhood, nearby park or woods, in your own backyard, or anywhere you can find fallen nature materials.

While exploring, observe your surroundings. Search for fallen nature materials and collect them in a reusable bag. Materials include (but are not limited to) sticks, hollow logs, rocks, pebbles, leaves, flower petals, moss, etc. Make sure to only collect loose items. Don't pick leaves or branches off living trees, or pluck flowers/plants that are still growing.

Get Crafting *Choose between the following nature crafting activities, or complete them all.*

1. Nature Rubbings:

- Choose different pieces of your collected nature materials and place under a thin sheet of paper.
- Place a crayon horizontally (or longways) against the top of the sheet of paper. Lightly rub the crayon up and down the paper over the nature material.

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- Continue this technique for as many of the nature materials as you'd like. Some items will be more difficult to create a rubbing and may need some extra assistance.
- When finished, compare the different designs created. Discuss how the texture of the nature materials helped create that design.

2. Create a mini nature scene:

- Choose an area in your yard, on your porch, or balcony.
- Using the collected nature materials, design a miniature nature scene of your choosing.
- You can include toys and other household items to help complete your scene.
- Ideas include a toad house, create your own island, build a miniature habitat for your favorite animal, or design a fairy village.
- When finished, discuss what was made and how the different materials were used.

3. Create a nature mobile:

- In addition to nature materials, you will need tape and string/thread/yarn.
- Choose two sturdy sticks that measure about the same length. Make an X with the sticks and use the string to tightly tie them together.
- Cut 4-8 pieces of string 8-16 inches long.
- Tie one piece of string at the end of the four edges. If the sticks are long enough, tie one piece of string halfway between the edge and the middle of the four sides.
- Begin tying different nature materials onto the strings. Use tape to secure items if needed.
- Choose a place to hang the mobile that can be easily viewed and observed. Spend time observing the mobile and how the different materials move in the wind.



**credit: <https://artfulparent.com/make-nature-mobile-for-kids-with-gathered-materials-and-air-dry-clay/>*

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4. Camouflage Art:

- Lay down some newspaper on a table or flat surface.
- Pour some of the brown and green paint onto a paper plate.
- Using your paintbrush, cover your canvas with strokes of brown and green. There's no right way to do this, so get creative and have fun!
- Press some of the items you found outside (leaves, branches, bark, etc.) onto the wet paint on the canvas.



**credit: Firefliesandmudpies.com*

- Set your art aside to allow it to dry.
- Clean-up your art space and return any natural objects that you did not use back outside.
- And voilà! You now have your very own piece of unique camouflage art!

5. Bark or tree rubbings:

- Find a tree or trees with interesting bark patterns.
- Hold a piece of paper up to the bark or leaf. On the top of the paper, place a crayon horizontally on the paper and gently rub up and down. Observe the pattern that is created.
- Use different sections of the tree or different leaves to get different patterns.

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**credit: Sarah-sunshinedaydream.blogspot.com*

6. Leaf tracing:

- Pick a fallen leaf and trace it on a sheet of paper. Draw in the details.
- If you don't have crayons or paper, you can use sidewalk chalk or draw in the dirt.



**credit: <https://www.firstpalette.com/craft/leaf-rubbings.html>*

7. Shadow tracing:

- Find the different shadows cast by the tree and trace them. You can use crayons and paper, sidewalk chalk, or just draw in the dirt.
- Bonus: Come back to the same tree at a different time of day and see how the shadows have changed and where they have moved.

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*credit:

<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/125749014579858655/>

Recap *Have a conversation about what you saw and questions your child may have.*

- What was your favorite item you found and why?
- How did the exploration outside make you feel?
- (If you did multiple crafts), what was your favorite activity and why?
- What materials were most helpful for each craft/activity?

Relate *Create connections to the idea through activities.*

Playing in nature and with natural materials is an important factor in child development. It is a healthy, fun, and necessary part of their day. Spending time outside has been shown to have physical and mental long-term benefits. In addition, it allows the child to connect with the environment and creates compassion for all plants and animals. Encourage your child, and yourself, to get outside as much as possible and grow into an environmental steward.

It takes a team.... join ours

Help us save species by joining the “Zoo Conservation Corps” and raise awareness about wild animals, their habitats and why conserving both is so important. If your family members are on social media, post to show all your wonderful works for nature art, and use the hashtag #OnlyZooATL so that we can see all your great work!

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Want to know more....

- For more ideas on how to engage your child with nature, visit <https://zooatlanta.org/learn/at-home/backyard-activities/>
- For more resources about Nature Play, visit <https://naturalstart.org/feature-stories/parent%E2%80%99s-guide-nature-play>