

10 Educational Outdoor Activities

home learning in the garden



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For Learning and Play

Covid-19: Learning at Home

With the ongoing situation surrounding Covid-19 and school closures, we are aware of some of the pressures that teachers and nursery practitioners are under to help facilitate home-learning for the time being.

In light of this, we thought it would be helpful to share with you some straightforward outdoor learning and play ideas that can be enjoyed at home, for you to pass on to parents and carers.

Outdoor play and learning has so many benefits for children. It benefits all aspects of their health and development - with improved health and fitness, emotional wellbeing and independence, and an ability to concentrate and learn important skills, such as problem solving, communication, the ability to assess and manage risk, featuring high on the list.

So, if we can try to take one positive thing from school closures and cancelled after-school activities, to help us all get through this - we can see it as an opportunity to do all those things at home that we always want to do but never seem to have the time to do in our busy, everyday lives.

Play out in the garden, however big or small, out on your balcony or whatever area of outdoor space you may have at home. Read those great books gathering dust on the shelves. Bring out the construction toys and puzzles that get packed away for "another day."

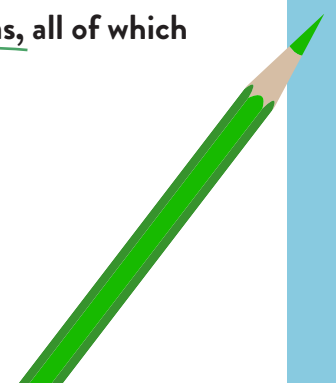
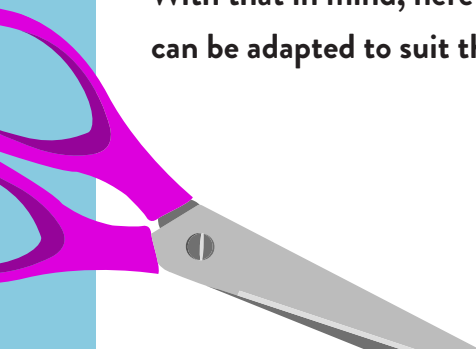
Being at home doesn't mean staying indoors if you feel well. There's a whole host of opportunities for children to learn and to have some fun right in your own backyard.

If children aren't at school getting the outdoor play breaks that they're used to, then it's really important to factor this in at home, for your sake as much as theirs! We all know how they need to exercise, to move, both for their physical and their mental health, so that they can get a good night's sleep, too.

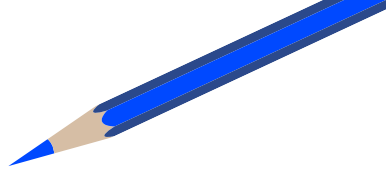
If you can take just half an hour to go out into your outdoor space, whatever it may be, and spend a little time setting it up for your children to play if it isn't already, it will save you a lot of time in the long run while you're trying to do other things.

Use umbrellas or a piece of tarpaulin or a blanket if you need to create shade or shelter, and don't worry about the mud or the weeds - they'll come in useful later! What's important is to try and make enough space for children to get a little exercise and some natural daylight to boost their Vitamin D levels, and their morale, every day.

With that in mind, here are 10 great fun and educational outdoor activity ideas, all of which can be adapted to suit the space you have at home:



1. Exercise Drills



Make sure you go outside for 15 minutes at the very least, every day, to enjoy some cardiovascular exercise in the fresh air. Whether in your garden, backyard or balcony, there are always options for keeping fit both physically and mentally.

Build a fun obstacle course to run, jump and climb around with anything you have - cardboard delivery boxes, chairs, toy boxes - let children find things to use for themselves (within reason!)

Use a yoga mat, foam blocks or blankets on harder surfaces. Repetitive exercises such as star jumps, squats, running on the spot, burpees, anything to get the heart pumping - your children will be able to show you what they usually do at school to keep fit!

2. Build a Den

Building a den is a great back-to-basics way for children to get creative outside, to have fun and switch off from everything else that is going on at the moment, and at the same time really practice their problem-solving and teamwork skills.

It's good invigorating physical exercise too, lifting and moving materials, threading, weaving and tying knots, moving around all the time as they play.

Best of all, it's a very easy activity to enjoy with resources you already have at home. Sticks from the garden, cardboard boxes, chairs, old blankets, sheets or towels, washing line or string, newspapers - anything you'd like really!

Take them all outside and let your children get to work, putting their own thinking skills to the test to build a space of their own.

If they build a sturdy enough den to last, it will come in very useful as a space for enjoying other activities when they really need to get outside, out of the house, and have a change of scenery.

outside, find a sunny spot or get cosy in your den, have a warm drink and enjoy as much reading in the fresh air as you possibly can.

Reading is one of the very best things a child can do to learn, and reading outdoors in the fresh air helps with concentration and bringing a book to life. Now is the time to make the most of the outdoor reading opportunity and get lost in a good book.

Set your children a free, outdoor, creative writing challenge. Be an author for the day. Take their pencils and notebooks outside with them and ask them to write a short story or a poem. Anything they like or suggest a theme if they're struggling.

The idea behind the word "free" is that there are no strict rules as to what they write if they're doing it outside - and even better, you won't be correcting their spelling or punctuation on this occasion! It's all about having some fun being creative, playing with words, getting their thoughts and ideas on paper and enjoying language.

Why not share their stories electronically with friends and family to keep each other engaged, connected, and having some fun together?

Ask for some "made-up stories" back to read aloud together!

4. Artist's Studio

Your child could set up a mini art studio inside their den, or anywhere else outside where you can find a sheltered spot.

Fill a box with simple art resources, crayons, paint and paper - and if you're stuck for those use some artistic licence. Leaf and mud sculptures just need "nature stuff" from the garden and water.

Give your child some ideas to keep them busy enjoying their creative art time.

Ask them to:

- Look out around them and paint what they see, or give them a theme to follow such as favorite stories, special people, superheroes or a theme of their own choice.

3. Outdoor Literacy

Gather up all those books that sit on the shelf waiting until you get a moment to read them. Take them

- Fresh air helps to inspire and helps them to concentrate so you can enjoy these activities outside (and not have to worry about mess in the house!)
- Do some chalk drawing on the concrete or patio, on a designated wall and even on the trees, it will wash away in the rain. Textured bark is really satisfying to draw on with chalk and it will help your children to develop their fine motor skills (and pencil grip) as well as their creativity. Have fun looking for knots in trees that look like eyes or noses and bring them to life!
- Gather sticks and twigs from the garden to make puppets or action figures tied with string or rubber bands. You can use a vegetable peeler to whittle down the bark to make hands and faces to draw on with a felt-tip pen.

5. Design & Construct Garden Sculptures

Cardboard construction is another back-to-basics creative activity best enjoyed outside where they have the space to move around and build their structures.

Use cardboard delivery boxes, cereal boxes, toilet roll tubes and sellotape. Children can paint their structure as a castle, a tower or a rocket - anything they like! It's all good for creativity, problem solving, challenging their imagination, and using their fine motor skills.

They could build towers out of rocks or pebbles or anything else they can find in the garden - have a family challenge to see who can build the tallest tower or the tower that stands up the longest! This is a good concentration and hand-eye coordination activity too.

coming into the spring now and there are so many incredible, wonderful changes happening out there for children to experience!

Go into your outside space and really explore everything that might be growing there. Pick some leaves or a sprig of blossom. Pull it apart if you like and have a look at how it's made up.

This is great for learning about plant reproduction and life-cycles and you can find information, descriptions and videos online that support this kind of science-based learning to suit your child's age group.

You could set up a Weather Watch outside, great if you have a thermometer but it's not essential. You need a measuring jug, bucket or bowl for collecting water, a ruler or tape measure, and a piece of paper and a pencil to make a "chart" for recording observations. Ask your child to go outside every day, observe the weather, and think about how it feels (warm, cold, breezy, fresh etc):

- Write it down on your chart, check and record the temperature if you have a thermometer, and write down a detailed description of your observations.
- Map the changing seasons - as we are coming into spring there is so much going on out there - what can you see that's different today? Notice the small amazing things and include them in your description. Do this for a few weeks and it will be interesting to reflect back on how the season has changed your garden.
- Has there been any rainfall? Leave your measuring jug or bowl outside all the time and as it fills, measure the water level every day. Keep a daily record.

All of these activities support a child's scientific and mathematical learning as they count, measure, observe, make predictions and test theories.

6. Explore Your Garden's Science

There is so much diversity out there even in the smallest of gardens - you just have to look for it. We're

7. Build a Bug Hotel

This is a great time of year for mini-beasts as the insects are coming out of hiding - and young children love a bug hunt!

They can make a little Bug Hotel by piling up twigs and leaves in a hidden corner and waiting to see who comes to visit. Encourage insects by filling the gaps between the layers with things to make their visitors at home, such as cardboard tubes, shredded paper, feathers and pebbles. Keep checking each day to see who has moved in!

There's lots of information online about mini-beasts so you can research together and find out some fun facts about your visitors.

8. Make a Mini Mud Kitchen

Use a washing up bowl and some old pots, pans and kitchen utensils for children to get "messy" outside.

A bag of play sand, flour and water, or some modelling clay, all of which can be ordered online for delivery, are great for this if you prefer not to use soil from the garden.

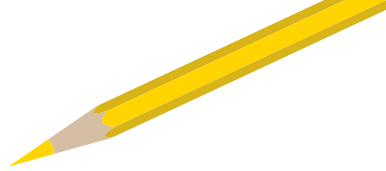
Clay is a great natural modelling material and can be combined with things that your child finds outdoors to make fascinating creations (perhaps a hedgehog with twigs for spines).

Playing with any kind of tactile material is good for fine motor control and developing the muscles needed for handwriting. It has the same satisfying sensation as making mud pies and it's very easy to manage outdoors where the rain washes away any "overspill".

9. Grow Green Fingers

Have a go at planting and growing some of your own flowers, fruit and vegetables - now is the perfect time of year to start planting!

You don't need a big garden. You could designate a small area of your garden, or use one large plant pot if



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you have only a small space. It's very easy to get hold of easy-to-grow seeds online and in supermarkets, and a quick Google search for "easy to grow vegetables" will point you in the right direction and show you what to do and how to look after them.

With any luck your children might have their own delicious crop to enjoy by the summer!

Gardening is a wonderfully calming, therapeutic, and relationship-building activity for everyone to enjoy. It's also regularly used to teach children science topics: life-cycles, ecosystems, seed germination, plant properties, and discussions around healthy eating amongst the many. Count seeds and take measurements as you go to practice basic maths, too.

10. Outdoor Yogo & Mindful Meditation

Yoga is known for its power to help us cope with anxiety - especially important in these difficult times - and great to practice as a family. An online search will reveal plenty of meditation exercises suitable for children, all revolving around deep breathing.

There are some great online yoga videos aimed at children with some fun and comforting exercises to help them feel better - try the Cosmic Kids Yoga channel on YouTube.

Outdoor yoga gives us the opportunity to go outside and get back to nature, tune in to our surroundings away from all the usual hectic schedules to boost our mental wellbeing and even to learn some new life skills.

However you choose to enjoy the outdoors at home, make sure you take some photos!

We'd love to see how you're making the most of your time at home and the wonderful home-learning activities you're setting up for your children on our Facebook and Twitter pages.