

## 101 Outside Play Ideas

1. Pop a blanket down, lie back and look at the clouds moving by.



2. Hold a snail.

3. Download and pin up this poster.  
<http://progressiveearlychildhoodeducation.blogspot.com.au/2012/04/let-children-play-poster.html>



4. Shh - be quiet – what can you hear?  
Woodpeckers drumming  
Birds singing, cuckoos calling,  
The sound of falling rain!  
Chirping grasshoppers  
Breezes in the tree tops  
Buzzing bees, buzzing wasps  
Rustles in the grasses  
Croaking frogs.



5. Make the longest daisy chain.

6. Hold a worm for a count of 10.

7. Visit a park you've never been to.

8. Collect items from the woodland floor that will remind you of your visit, for example fallen petals, twigs, buds blown down in the wind, lichen, cones etc. Find a small place in your garden or find an old shallow container and create your own woodland garden: use cress, grass or flower seeds, plant any recently fallen twigs with leaf buds, keep them watered and watch the buds burst into leaf!



9. Build a mini-beast city using things you find on the woodland floor, somewhere they can hide from predators, somewhere they can bask in the sun to warm up and get moving, somewhere they can find food. Why not give them a mini-beast playground too. Watch to see if they move in .

10. Follow a trail – follow a line of ants, a bee, a spider, paw prints – anything at all that moves.

11. Create your own ant trail – act like an ant and play follow the leader, but find a way of having six legs per ant (think wheel barrow race type activity).

12. Get a water butt and have fun with the rain water - splash out while pretending to wash a car or toys.

13. Splat a mud pie.

14. Most people love a good den, but don't forget the easy pop-up versions too! Get a tent and camp out in the playground. Go in the tent when it's raining too.

15. Form a volcano with sand or earth, leaving a hole in the top for the materials. Then add about 2 tablespoons of baking soda and  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of vinegar (depending on the size of the volcano). For best results, add red food colouring to the vinegar before you pour it in.



16. Catching popcorn! With the help of an extension lead, move the popcorn maker outside and take the lid off. How many pieces of popcorn can you catch?



17. If you are lucky enough to have the storage space, collect and keep a selection of wellies and waterproof trousers in a range of sizes, so you can play whatever the weather (good for parents who usually look cross at picking up time!).



18. Go on safari – get some binoculars, have a list of things you're keen to see and take a trip on the wild side. No binoculars? Then how about a camera instead?

19. Put up a nesting box, bird feeder, butterfly house and watch the activity.

20. Splash in a puddle.

21. Climb a tree – yes really! Go on, do it! It's not that bad!

22. Create a garden area – attract the butterflies with some flowers, and create a little seating area too, so it's easy to sit and watch the flutters go by .



23. Build a fairy garden – find a little spot where you'd like to live if you were a fairy. Build a house out of lollipop sticks or anything that takes your fancy, and pop it next to the spot, then landscape the garden, maybe even have a fairy sized swimming pool too. More than one or two fairies? Then get busy creating a fairy complex, have houses, schools, playgrounds .....



24. Make some wind chimes and hang up inside and outside.

25. Paint a Hopscotch court on the floor.

26. Use junk - think recycled, old tyres, plastic pipes, bread crates, planks of wood, pots and pans, cardboard boxes.

27. Stop to smell the roses and any other flowers you find growing nearby. Make a keepsake of a favorite natural find: press your flowers or make leaf prints. To press flowers, simply put them between pieces of waxed paper and close them in a big book. To make leaf prints, ink a leaf with a sponge and press it into paper for an instant artistic creation!

28. The rain shouldn't stop play – remember umbrellas and raincoats help keep play going. Watch leaves float after rain, and jump into or over puddles.

29. Create a dirt patch – one area that's zoned off (or raised up in a sand pit type way), add some mud, sand, dirt and rainwater so it's mucky! Paint with mud too.



30. Story stones - use crayons and felt pens to decorate stones to tell a story, perhaps a stone for each character.



31. Make bubbles – put 10 cups of water in a bucket and add 1 cup washing-up liquid and 4 tbsp liquid glycerine (from a chemist) or light corn syrup. Stir gently. You can use fly swatters, which are easy to flick and swish, or make a wand by sliding 2 straws on a piece of string. Tie a knot in the end. Using the 'handles' dip the wand into the bubble solution. Or drop a 6 pack beverage holder (the clear plastic thing with lots of holes) into the bubble solution. Wave around in the air, creating clusters of bubbles.



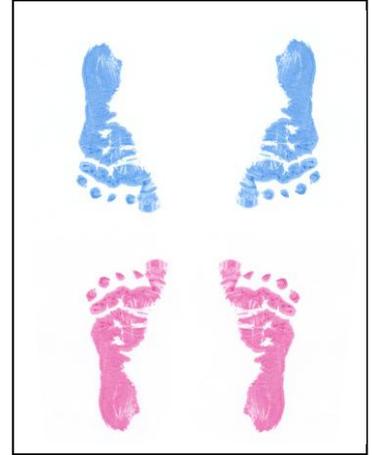
32. Make a worm farm - find a plastic container large enough to fit worms and soil. Layer soil and sand in the container, making sure the top layer is soil. If the soil is dry, add some water so it stays moist. Go looking for worms, gather your worms. Add food (lettuce, egg shells, tea bags, coffee grinds, fruit peel) to the top of the container. After you've seen them burrow and play, be gentle and return the worms! Nice to do after the rain, as worms are easier to spot.

33. Pebble art – find some stones, bits and pieces and create art on a large scale. For best results, try and have your canvas somewhere where you can take a look at it from a height like an upstairs window.

34. Build a labyrinth with stones.

35. Paint with water – get a range of paint brushes, some really fat ones too, plus some rollers and buckets of water. Maybe add some mud or water colours, and happily paint away.

36. Messy play. Be honest - does the thought of messy play like hand prints, foot prints or generally flinging the paint around make you cringe? Well, take the pressure off by having messy play outside. Use a wipeable table cloth to protect the space if you feel the need. Plant pots can weigh down big pieces of paper, and just chill out. A washing-up bowl nearby is a handy tip to stop footprints getting out of control!



37. Put on a concert, The Voice, X Factor or Britain's Got Talent. Whatever it is, go outside and you'll find it easier to be louder!!



38. Play parachute games - only this time add water!! Afterwards it's a muddy skid slide - you have been warned.

39. Splatter ball painting - literally tennis balls in paint thrown down onto pieces of paper or the ground.

40. Mosquito nets or net curtains make a handy play den, separate but still see-through.

41. Make a 'small world'. It's essentially a portable sandpit, which means you put any small bits in to create another world. Use scraps of material, small dishes, fake flowers, pebbles, driftwood pieces, shells, plastic butterflies etc. These can be arranged and rearranged endlessly to create worlds and fairy gardens.



42. Pong-tastic  
Collect rose petals or any flower petals that take your fancy and pop them in a small jam jar. Add a little water, put the lid on and leave outside for a couple of days. What does it smell like? Have you created your own rosewater perfume? Are you brave enough to strain the contents, pop it in a spray bottle and use it!

43. Make a xylophone  
Cut some 2x4 bits of wood to length (start with a 10 inch piece and increase each piece by 2 inches). Sand the pieces if you wish. Drill a hole through each board in either end. Run a rope through each piece of wood, tie a knot between each board. String up the whole instrument and bang away! For more pictures check out <http://www.simplejoyfulliving.com/2012/03/music-outside.html>



44. Loose parts in the playground = hours of self-directed play

Let the children manipulate their play space to fit their own ideas or visions. Find tyres, boxes, boards, planks, logs, stumps, pallets and any number of other versatile buildables. Providing a rich diversity of interesting loose parts that can be mixed, lifted, carried, stacked, shaped, pushed, pulled, gathered and rearranged gives children limitless opportunities to play in creative, productive and exciting ways: stones, stumps, sand, gravel, fabric, twigs, wood, pallets, balls, buckets, baskets, crates, boxes, logs, rope, tyres, shells, seedpods etc.....



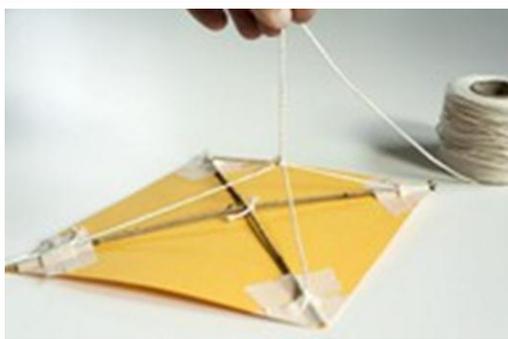
45. Make a tree spirit

Slap some mud onto a tree trunk, use twigs, leaves, flowers, stones (anything natural) to make a face and create your own tree spirit. Maybe he needs his hair dressing too, so add ribbons etc.

46. Grow something to eat - cress, tomatoes or potatoes are easy.

47. Make some space, whether it's a den or just some shade, and read outside – you can take the books outside, it's OK!

48. Make rain paintings - dust some powder paint or drops of food colouring on some thick paper and take it outside to let the rain drops do their thing.



49. Fly a kite.

50. Make a kite.

51. Build a maze.

52. Watch the 'Playing with fire' DVD – if you think you can't possibly have a fire, watch clips of how children as young as 3 are outside and having fun, playing very safely and responsibly, but exploring the element of fire. Sometimes it's about just admitting you are nervous.

53. Watch tadpoles turn into frogs .

54. Calling all playschemes! A 'wake up, shake up dance' is still a fun way to start the day, particularly if you haven't got much space inside. Make it different from the school ones though: let the children create their very own playscheme wiggle.

55. Tug of war – Oxfordshire Play Association have lovely resources, and one (of many) that you can hire is a giant tug-of-war rope. This goes on for hours - great for boys! Dads usually muscle in too if it's done near home time, and get surprisingly competitive!



56. Fire pits – a great idea if you feel an ‘open fire’ is just all too much for you. Here are a few things you could do: snuggle up and tell stories....

57. Roast marshmallows.

58. Cook jacket potatoes.

61. Tin can cooking – a small baked bean tin with some holes in, inverted over a tea light makes a good surface for pancakes or drop scones.

62. Make bread, or simply toast some bread. It doesn't need to get all complicated - it's supposed to be fun!

59. Cook apples - core an apple, and add some honey and raisins if you like. Or how about a banana instead? Wrap up in foil and roast for a while.

60. Cook some soup, or maybe a lovely cup of hot chocolate.

63. We've said it before, but it's too good to miss – arm pit fudge. Place 2oz icing sugar, 1 tbsp butter, 2 tsp cream cheese, a bit of vanilla essence, 2 tsp cocoa powder in a sandwich size plastic zipper bag. Squeeze out all the air before you close it up. Squish and smooch under the arm(!) until well mixed and creamy. Add anything you like e.g. raisins or m&m's, take a spoon, and enjoy. Since we are talking fire play, why not create a dance around the fire (think rain dance) to energise your squishing and smooching – the arm pit dance!



64. Play Poohsticks.

65. Build a pebble stack.

66. Play conkers – it's a myth that they are not allowed in schools or you have to wear safety goggles and protective clothing.



67. Make a boat or raft, or a model of one, out of natural materials and/or loose parts.

68. Get some giant chunky chalks and just let the children do what they want, maybe create a logo for the club? Have a graffiti wall to find out what they like / dislike.

69. Take the inside outside; literally move everything your setting has outside. Create the same space but outside. Yes, it's hard work, but watch the children's faces when inside becomes a blank space and outside is their familiar set-up. It's the same but different!

70. In the woods, find tree trunks that are lying flat on the ground. Walk along them using your arms to balance yourself - have a little competition to see who can get the furthest.

71. Play tag.

72. Play stuck-in-the-mud.

73. Skipping games.

74. Assault courses.

75. Dust off the parachute, either play the usual games or simply have it as a giant picnic blanket, or maybe a stage.

76. Have a cartwheel race.

77. Leap frog lines – leap frog as many times as you can in a row.

79. Find out if your outside space can change, for example can you see if the school will allow one bit of grass area to grow really long. Just by changing the cutting of the grass, things change enough to be interesting and different for children. It feels different, looks different, you can hide things in it, running is harder. If you don't ask you'll never know.

78. Wriggle relay - form relay lines. Everyone in each line puts their left hand between their legs and the person behind grabs that hand with their right hand. Then they run at a given signal to the other end of the playing area and back. The first team to return 'intact' wins.

80. Water balloon fun (although be mindful that not everyone can handle a balloon, some children are allergic to them or simply don't like the touch of them, so know your children well). Set up a summer themed obstacle course. Children place a water balloon under their chins and must negotiate the obstacle course without breaking the balloon.

81. Make some ice lollies to have outside in the sunshine. You can use lolly moulds, or small freezable plastic cups and teaspoons will do. Make some squash or fruit juice, pour into the cups (or moulds), stick in the teaspoons and freeze. Add fruit too if you fancy.

Store loose parts creatively, so they are easy to access.

82. Don't forget the music. Grab an extension lead or have battery power and take the radio or CD player outside with you. Put the volume up and have a dance, or simply have it in the background.

83. Play outdoor twister – paint red and blue circles etc on the grass, so its twister, but outside. Make the board as big as you like. (Water colours mean it's not that permanent!). Do the same on concrete by chalking the circles.



84. Have breakfast outside - any breakfast clubs out there - don't be afraid to have your breakfast picnic-style. Take out blankets, cushions etc, then it's breakfast as usual.

85. Play with a Frisbee.



86. Have a music wall – literally a wall dedicated to music.

87. Try really hard not to direct the play, take a step back and just see what the children come up with when they play by themselves. Put your hand over your mouth if it helps you not to say “why don’t you do ....”

88. Have a space dedicated to performance – just clear a little section, add a border of pebbles or something similar, you can even put woodchips in the middle to separate it out further.



89. Make a giant noughts and crosses board in chalk on the playground.

90. Build a bird house and hang / put it up a tree.

91. If you’re going on a trip, take ages to get there – half the fun can be had by playing games as you are walking to the venue / activity. Allow extra time so you can see all the little games and conversations that happen when you’re not pressured about arriving somewhere quickly.

92. Hide and seek outside – be warned this can go on forever! You may want to have whistles for the hidiers so they can be found eventually.

93. Make mud cakes with sticks for candles and feed them to the worms.



94. Make a bird bath and pop it somewhere that’s easy to see (but not scary for birds) – upside down dustbin lids work well. Paint / sponge on designs.

95. Hold the door open and shout ‘ready, steady, run like the wind’.

96. Sleeping bags make lovely play areas or props. Make sure to turn them inside out before you put them away as usually there are stowaways lurking in the bottom, yuck!

97. Collect loads of chunky sticks (ask people who have dogs to collect some for you on their walks) so you can build up a stock of these ‘loose parts’. Simply have a pile of them handy and you’ll be amazed at how many things children can turn a stick into.

98. Bring back Jacks or marbles



99. Explore lemonade rockets - roll up a handful of sweets with sugar shells (e.g. Mentos, Skittles or M&M's) in paper to make a stick about 6cm high. Cover one end with a small square of card (10cm by 10cm). Open a 2 litre bottle of lemonade, remove the cap, and place the roll of sweets on top (with the card still in place). When you're ready, pull the card away so the sweets fall quickly into the bottle. Make a swift getaway to avoid getting soaked! (Works with cola too)

100. Rake up a pile of leaves or grass cuttings and then destroy the pile – leave the rake out so it's easy to do whenever anyone feels like it.

101. Build a bug catcher – dig a hole so an empty baked bean tin (with one end removed and filed down to remove sharp edges) fits snugly inside, without any gaps around the edges, and level with the soil. Place small stones on the soil surface just outside the tin. Put a tile or slate on top of the stones to protect the catcher from rainfall, and this will create a damp shady area, perfect for attracting bugs out on a midnight stroll. Leave overnight and hopefully you should have some visitors. See how many bugs you can collect (but remember to set them free).

Just chat – not everyone has to be 'doing' something. Most childhood memories contain time chatting to friends. Feel comfortable in creating wonderful spaces where children can just 'be' (either on their own or with friends). An adult isn't needed unless you are invited in (this invitation is a called a 'play cue'). Simply hover on the sidelines and take in what everyone is doing, resisting the urge to take part yourself.

### Tips to help parents embrace messy play

Don't let parents put you off providing great play opportunities, just be honest and up-front about what you do and why you do it. Children have fun, learn and discover lots of things about themselves and the environment when they are given the freedom to do so.

#### 1. Let parents know what they are signing up for

Explain that children have fun and learn through play - and play can be messy, dirty, wet, muddy and sandy. Children will (if they want to) be walking, playing outside, digging in dirt, painting - and coming home looking like they have done all of those things.

#### 2. Help parents to be prepared

Make a parent handbook to give tips and strategies for equipping their child for a day of play, for example: 'Dress children in old clothes, or clothes you won't mind getting dirty or covered in paint. Send children with a couple of clothing changes. Dress children appropriately for the weather conditions. Rainy days mean raincoats and wellies'.

#### 3. Be prepared yourself

Spare clothes are sometimes forgotten, or rain coats left at home on a rainy day, so support parents by having supplies at hand. A cupboard (accessible to children) holds spare clothes, raincoats, wellies etc. Families sometimes kindly donate the clothing their children have outgrown. Have lots of towels handy.

(Adapted from <http://progressiveearlychildhoodeducation.blogspot.co.uk/2011/06/5-tips-to-help-parents-embrace-messy.html>)