



**Top tips for
making the best
use of the outdoors
- things to
consider**

- Look at your outdoor area from a child's view. Are legs all they see, tables, chairs, sand tray and people? How can we change this perspective?
- Reflect on your children's development and what types of movement experiences they might need next (refer to The Pyramid of Learning Taylor and Trott 1991)
- Don't wait until you have redesigned your area, you may learn what the children need by watching their play. How are resources or equipment actually used by children? How can these be built on?
- Are resources open-ended so that they can be used, moved and combined in a variety of ways?
- Ensure there is enough space to enable large movements which you may not be able to do inside. Also consider quiet areas to encourage conversation or contemplation.
- Does the learning environment allow the engagement of all the senses? Develop areas thinking about all seven senses. Remember, movement unlocks all learning.
- Is the learning environment challenging and full of creative and innovative opportunities?
- Create a movement rich environment which promotes risky play. It can involve height, motion, speed, spinning, tipping, hanging, rolling, and gives joy in precariousness and unpredictability. Playing on the edge of capability testing skills, speed and endurance etc.
- Physical risk provides mental challenge and adults should encourage children by:
 - Respecting each child's individual agency and right to take risks.
 - Never picking them up and putting them somewhere they cannot get themselves.
 - Not holding hands unless asked when manoeuvring, climbing, jumping off, and balancing.
 - Never putting pressure on a child to try a risk, they are not yet ready for.

- Support children to assess risk for themselves. There is evidence that risk and challenge in a supportive environment is positively linked with emotional well-being, resilience and mental health and that small mistakes and minor accidents can offer some protection against the negative effects of future failure. *“When planning and providing learning opportunities, the goal is not to eliminate risk, but to weigh up risks and benefits. No child will learn about risk if they are wrapped up in cotton wool”* Health and Safety Executive 2012
- Work in partnership with staff, parents and the children on risk benefit analysis (the ratio of the risk of an action to its potential benefits). Parents need to understand that children will sometimes get minor injuries from their play/risk taking in the outdoors and that is all part of the learning.
- Utilise the local area and the wealth of knowledge in the community. Invite grandparents to come in and develop a patch of land with the children. Invite someone from The National Trust to meet you in the park and talk about the natural environment. Ask a historian or storyteller to share legends and tales associated with animals and plants.
- To make the most of being outdoors make sure everyone wears appropriate clothing and footwear. The clothing will change according to the weather, seasons and type of learning and play taking place.

Websites/useful documents

<https://education.gov.scot/nih/Documents/hwb24-ol-support.pdf>

Outdoor Learning Practical guidance, ideas and support for teachers and practitioners in Scotland

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/out-play-practical-guidance-creating-outdoor-play-experiences-children/>

Out to Play - Practical guidance for creating outdoor play experiences in early learning and Childcare

<https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/29489312/pdf-foundation-stage-learning-outdoors-northern-ireland->

Learning outdoors in the Early Years- A Resource Book

<https://www.muddyfaces.co.uk/outdoor-hub/>

Fantastic activities and ideas for outdoor learning

<https://playsafetyforum.wordpress.com/?s=risk+benefit>

Play Safety Forum ('PSF'), formed in 1993, exists to consider and promote the wellbeing of children and young people through ensuring a balance between safety, risk and challenge in respect of play and leisure provision.

<https://playsafetyforum.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/managing-risk-in-play-provision.pdf>

Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation Guide

<https://www.ltl.org.uk/understanding-risk/>

Learning Through Landscapes is a leading UK charity dedicated to making lives better through connection with nature.

Generic and specific risk benefit assessments are available to download.



Fun and games outside

- Lie on your back and look at the clouds-what can you see? Close your eyes and listen to the world around you-what can you hear? Experience the weather from first hand-how does it feel?
- Collect some natural materials like leaves, twigs and moss and make a woodland garden. Stones and logs can also be used to create a 'Bug Hotel' for wildlife to move into. Equally, you can let your imagination run wild and create a fairy garden or a playground for Boggarts (mischievous goblin-like creatures) complete with swimming pool, swings etc
- Den building-this can be as quick as a pop up tent or cardboard box or you can go to town using furniture and sheets/tarpaulin or use what nature provides, branches and leaves.
- Wild art/Pebble art – find some stones, bits and pieces and create art on a large scale. For best results, try and have your background somewhere where you can take a look at it from a height like an upstairs window. For smaller scale projects provide old picture frames to showcase the finished work.
- Get a water butt and have fun with the rain water - splash out. 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.
- Have a music wall – literally a wall dedicated to music. 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.
- Messy play-create a dirt patch, one area that is zoned off (or raised up in a sand pit), add some mud, sand, soil and rainwater. Add some pots and pans or a variety of painting implements (including natural resources like sticks, twigs and stones). Splatter ball painting – throw tennis balls dipped in paint down onto pieces of paper. Hand and foot prints are also good fun outside with a washing-up bowl of soapy water handy.
- Story telling. Story stones - use crayons and felt pens to decorate stones to tell a story, perhaps a stone for each character.
- Write a story inspired by woods and trees. Research the types of things you would expect to find in a forest along with the names of the trees. Some ideas might be:
 - A tree has fallen in the woods
 - A character has gone missing
 - An animal is shouting an alarm call
 - There are some mysterious footprints to follow.
- Create areas to attract wildlife so you can appreciate nature-make a bird bath and pop it somewhere that's easy to see (but not scary for birds) upside down dustbin lids work well. Make birdfeeders and experiment with different types of seed to see which kinds of birds you can attract.
- Grow plants to create shade and provide different sensory experiences. Train a bean plant to grow over a wire or bamboo arch tunnel. Lie underneath and look at the pattern of shade as the light tries to break through. This could also be trained over the top of a slide or you could make a den by making a willow structure. Other climbing plants could be used including fragrant sweet peas, which look beautiful, smell divine, and attract lots of butterflies, bees, and birds to your garden. Why not grow Birdhouse Gourd and use the dried out fruit to make bird houses or musical instruments?
- Make a sensory garden. Research plants and herbs for maximum smell, plants like Lavender, Mint, Honeysuckle etc. Buy some seeds that attract butterflies and intersperse with grass and pebbles to add texture.
- Grow something to eat - cress, tomatoes or potatoes are easy. You don't need lots of space, windowsills, small containers, grow bags or even hanging baskets can be used.

Woodland Trust-Bug Hotel: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2019/09/how-to-build-a-bug-hotel/>

The National Trust-Build a Den and Create some Wild Art: <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/no-4-build-a-den>
<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/no-18-create-some-wild-art>

Den building at home:
<https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/support-for-parents/top-5-tips-for-den-building-with-your-children/>

How to make a bird feeder:
https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/looking-after-yourself-and-nature?gclid=EAlaIQobChMli--1jcGa6wIVnIBQBh36xQd2EAAYASAAEgKe1PD_BwE

DIY Bean Trellis:
<https://www.bhg.com/home-improvement/outdoor/ pergola-arbor-trellis/diy-bean-trellis/>

Dried Gourd Maracas:
<https://www.gardeningknowhow.com/special/children/making-gourd-maracas.htm>
<https://www.wonderbaby.org/articles/grow-a-musical-instrument>
<https://www.globetrottingkids.com/grow-musical-instrument/>

RHS-create a sensory garden
<https://www.rhs.org.uk/get-involved/community-gardening/resources/sensory-garden>

Gardener's path-The Best 11 Vegetables to Grow in Pots and Containers
<https://gardenerspath.com/plants/vegetables/best-container/>

