



# Nature Play

Your Monthly Booklet



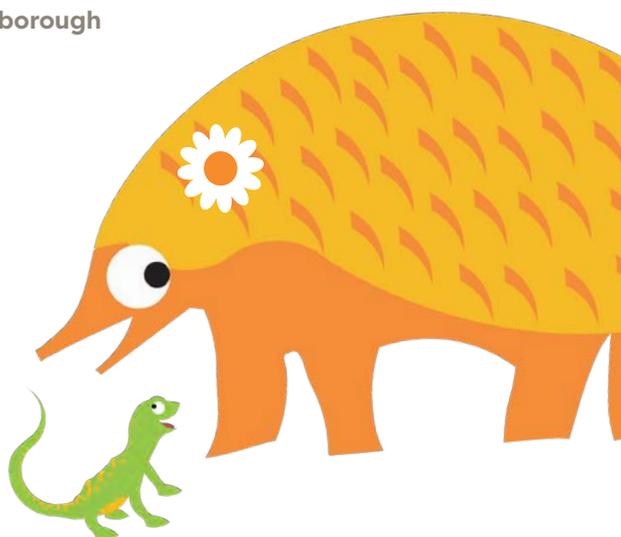
**“If you truly love nature,  
you will find beauty  
everywhere.”**

Vincent Van Gogh



**“An understanding of the natural world and what’s in it is a source of not only a great curiosity but great fulfilment.”**

- David Attenborough



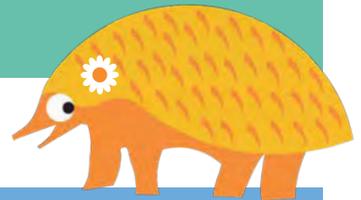
There are seldom nicer sounds than that of children playing happily outside- the sound of chatter, exploration, discovery and squeals of joy; or of quite concentration, a hum of contentment.

The outside world holds within its palm a treasure trove of learning opportunities. Not only does the outside world teach us about the cycles of life, it teaches us what it is to be human in an ever-changing world.



## Natural Instinct

Humans have long relied on their knowledge of the outdoor world to survive- using the sun to determine the time, differentiating between edible plants and dangerous ones, when bad weather is approaching, where animals live and roam. Progressively, we have developed new ways of living. Interestingly, modern lifestyles can draw us away from the natural world, and yet we are irrevocably linked. We rely on nature- for food, sustenance, hydration, vitamins, minerals, sunshine in the form of Vitamin D for our health and wellbeing. Learning about nature at a young age holds children in good stead for their future.



## The Rewards of Nature are Endless

The more curiosity and passion you carry, the more life will reward you, as there are so many things to see and discover.

For young children, the outdoor world is the largest learning tool. It quite literally helps them develop neurons and connect pathways in the brain through play. Nature helps them to build their physical capabilities, it nurtures their emotive receptors, builds their awareness as different stimuli enter their world. By placing your baby down on a mat in the garden or park, or by a window, you are engaging their mind. These experiences aid their development. Between the ages of 0-5, children observe keenly and absorb information like a sponge.

*“Look deep into nature and you will understand everything better.” - Albert Einstein*



“Cherish the natural world because you’re a part of it and you depend on it.”

- David Attenborough



## Amazing in the True Sense of the Word

Not only does David Attenborough inspire and implore us to look, see, inspect and marvel at the wonders of the world, he also invites us to be part of a never-ending fascinating voyage, with nature as our companion. Never again will you be lonely! One who appreciates nature is enriched. One who is intrigued by the astounding change and re-generation of nature through the seasons is never bored.

*“All the trees are losing their leaves and not one of them is worried.” - Donald Miller*

The garden is a hive of activity. Beneath the surface, there is much at work as roots surge deep into the soil, water trickles through, seeds re-sprout, unite with others and burst open in new growth.

*“We still do not know one thousandth of one percent of what nature has revealed to us.”- Albert Einstein*

## Open the senses



When we enter a green space, our senses become much more attune to the environment. Regular time in nature allows our senses to fall into step with the natural world. There are lots of beautiful fragrances, sounds, sights and things to touch that reconnect us, calm us and bring us joy.

Often, especially in big cities, our senses are dulled down to tune out parts of the noise in our environment that we may find unpleasant. In doing so, we tune out all of the musicality of nature, too. There truly is a symphony of music in the outdoor world, especially on a balmy Australian night- cicadas, crickets, frogs, owls.

*“I felt my lungs inflate with the onrush of scenery- air, mountains, trees, people. I thought, ‘This is what it is to be happy’” - Sylvia Plath*

# Nature play is an essential part of learning

Victoria has an abundance of nature-based playgroups and they continue to sprout and grow.



“We need to connect children to nature in the essential 4-7 year old period, empowering parents and guardians to lead and support this connection and in a way rekindling their connection or growing one of their own. Get dirty with the kids. Be full of wonder for what could live in that hollow or why that mushroom colony lives on that log, but not that one.”

Jarrold Paine, BushPlay Project Founder

*Merri Creek Bush  
Playgroup*

*Sophia Mundi Steiner  
School Nature Playgroup*

*Bright Wild Things*

*A Playgroup Among the  
Gumtrees*



Check out a local bush playgroup



# Explorer Kit

Every explorer needs a few tools of the trade! For your very own explorer kit you will need:

- A backpack
- A bucket and spade for moving the earth
- Magnifying glass to spot those teeny tiny creatures
- Bug net (I wonder what you can catch?)
- Cardboard container with holes - to store the amazing things you find
- Sketchbook and crayons - for impromptu landscape sketchings
- Binoculars for spotting creatures far and wide
- Information books for discovering different species
- Cup for collecting water
- Paint brush for dusting rocks or maybe even fossils
- Compass and map to lead you in the right direction
- Camera - maybe you will discover a new species
- Comfy shoes are a must
- Healthy snacks for energy
- Check the weather! You may need a rain jacket

**What is in your explorer kit?**

Share your ideas on our [Facebook page](#)



**“The earth has music for  
those who will listen.”**

George Santanaya



## Your activities:

Head in the Clouds

Vine Teepees

Little Pioneers

The Garden Shop

Lavender Playdough

Explorer's Map

Recycled Seed Paper

Magical Lands in the Garden



**“How sweet to be a cloud.  
Floating in the blue!”**

A.A Milne

# Head in the Clouds



Head in the clouds is a child-led activity that helps children relax and their imagination to flourish. It's a great opportunity to co-create a fun or beautiful story together. It is also a good activity to train the eyes and it provides the opportunity to learn about clouds and weather on planet earth.

## Why not try...

Read a children's book about the weather together. To find a range of Children's' books on the weather [click here](#)

Learn about what clouds are and what their shapes say about the weather, using the [Cloud Spotter's Guide](#)

When you come home, draw the stories you have shared

## What you need:

A day with nice clouds  
Outdoor space  
Time and imagination

## What to do:

- + Find a nice patch of grass in your backyard or local park or sit on the beach or river bank with a good view of the sky
- + Invite children to look up at the sky. Find a nice vantage point to sit down or lie down
- + Share what you see. Are there any monsters? Animals? A boat? Anything is possible. You may see different things in the same cloud, and this is exciting!
- + Is there perhaps a story in the clouds? Are they changing? Where are they moving?

**KIDS  
IN NATURE  
NETWORK**

reconnecting kids to nature

Activity provided by Kids In Nature Network Victoria





## The Lungs of the World

It would be remiss of us not to mention trees. Trees are vital to the health of the world. Trees absorb carbon dioxide, preventing it from gathering in the atmosphere. Trees are also the home to some of our biggest ecosystems. In the Borneo rainforest and the Amazon, some trees are estimated to be 1000 years old. They are home to thousands of insects, animals and plant life that each play a role in our ecosystem.

## Small but Powerful

Some of the most important habitats on the planet are the smallest. Without insects, the ecosystems of our forests would cease to function. Each little bug and fluttering fly play a role - even the dung beetle! Dung beetles play a vital role in minimizing the amount of methane gas in the world by burying dung and breaking it down into matter that feeds the forest.



# Vine Teepees

Planting and growing things in the garden is a wonderfully immersive experience.

The children learn about the environment, the changing seasons, the changing weather and food sources. In time, if you have enough produce, you could make a salad together, sampling the different flavours of the vegetables and learning their names.



## What you need:

- A piece of flat land, around 3 metres wide
- Long bits of wood/ bamboo
- Bricks and String
- Climbing plants such as climbing beans, sweet peas, or other fruit and veg that you like, such as tomatoes or strawberries

## What to do:

- + Find a nice patch of dirt, dig a hole in the middle and place a stick about half a metre into the ground, ensuring that it is very steady
- + Attach one end of string to the stick and one to a brick, creating a teepee structure for things to grow on (see video below)
- + Once the structure is sturdy, you can begin to plant

[Watch a video example of the structure being made here on Gardening Australia](#)

## Why not try...

Steady your teepee center stick with brick at the base.

Encourage your child to help dig and place the plants into the soil, learning the types of plants as you go.

It is a joy to watch a seedling grow. This helps children develop patience and enjoy the process. Vegetables are ideal as you can monitor them and pick them when ripe.

## Being Free to Believe

Playing 'make believe' in the garden is a wonderful thing to do as a child. This allows kids to practice concepts and live out ideas. Pretending or role playing reinforces knowledge, comprehension and builds their capacity. By doing and experiencing, they are learning.



**“We cannot stay home all our lives, we must present ourselves to the world and we must look upon it as an adventure.”**

Beatrix Potter

# Little Pioneers

Wander down to your local creek, lake or ocean. Stay in the shallows and search for gold and treasures. See if you can find anything interesting. At the creek you might find yabbies, or at the ocean seaweed or shells.



## What you need:

A sieve or pan. Improvise with things you have around the house such as an old ice cream container or plastic bowl

A little bucket and spade

Bark, leaves, sticks, string, sticky tape, flowers

Gumboots

## Pan for Gold and Treasures

Pretend to be gold miners, fishermen, pirates, early explorers and artists. Ask the children if they can identify the things that they find.

Play a game of Duck Duck Goose while there or Ring a Ring a Rosie. You can make boats too. See below.

## Nature Boats

Create all types of boats and ships using natural materials. Pioneers are creative! Try using bark as base, leaf as sail and a twig as a mast. Take them down to the waters edge and see if they will float. If they do, have boat races.

If there is a bridge be inspired by Christopher Robin's old trick and place them down on one side of the bridge, and see which boat comes through the other side first.





**“A miracle constantly repeated becomes  
a process of nature .”**

Lyman Abbott



# The Garden Shop

All children love to play, and many share a universal interest in 'going shopping'. In this activity, children help to set up a garden shop using found or recycled materials. This dramatic and imaginative play area is a place for children to act out different roles, learn about money and discover new ideas and ways of understanding the world around them. Through this, children take ownership of their learning and are empowered by a play space that fosters their curiosity.



## What you need:

Furniture, such as tables and shelves

Cubby house or shelter (optional)

Garden-related props such as - rakes, spades, trowels, garden gloves, watering cans, baskets, seed packets, etc.

Paper, pencils and pens

## What to do:

+ Decide on the best place, indoors or outdoors, for setting up your gardening shop.

+ Brainstorm the types of things you typically find in a nursery or garden centre, and make a list

+ Collect the furniture and props you will need to create your gardening shop. Try to recycle or upcycle objects you already have, or ask the families at your centre or service for donations. Alternatively, you can purchase second-hand items from an op shop

+ Arrange the furniture and props so that the new space looks like a nursery or garden centre

+ Practice literacy and numeracy by making some signs for your shop

**Tip: Choose materials that are developmentally appropriate and allow for both creativity and flexibility in play**

## Ask the children...

What name will you give the shop?

How much are the items for sale?

What plants does your shop carry?

When is your shop open?

What specials can you offer your customers?





## Remember What It's Like

To touch, smell, listen, move, taste, feel - to run ones hands along the spine of a leaf or the furriness of moss. To catch the fragrance of jasmine on the breeze in the dawning of Spring or the smell of rain on a hot summers day.

To hear the chortle of a magpie or the rustling of leaves. To run across soft, spongy grass or to move buoyantly through the salty sea- to feel the warmth of sun rays on your back after a time of illness. Relief.

# Lavender Play Dough

This activity is simple and low cost. Let children help mix the dry ingredients and knead the dough. They love the feel, the colour and the smell!



## What to do:

- + Mix all dry ingredients
- + Add the boiling water and oil to dry mixture
- + Stir into a dough
- + Knead gently until smooth
- + Add sprigs of lavender to the dough
- + Mould, shape and create!

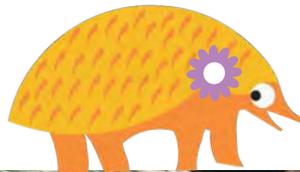


## What you need:

- Sprigs of lavender
- 1 cup of flour
- 1/2 cup salt
- 1 tbs McKenzie's Cream of Tartar
- 1 cup of boiling water mixed with 2 Tbs Oil
- Big bowl
- Wooden spoon

## Why not try this...

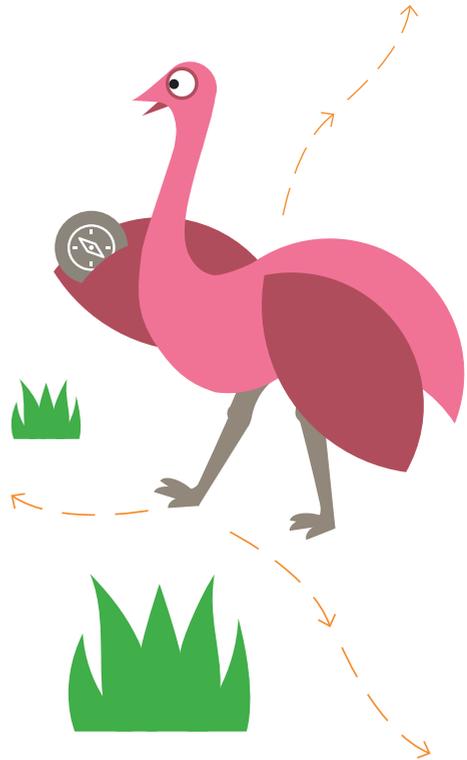
Add in few drops of lavender essential oil and/or purple food colouring for extra vibrancy



# Explorer's Map

An Explorer's map encourages children to explore and make a mental map of their local area, without using a phone, so they know their way. It gives children the space and time to observe where they are, explore the places where they live and play and to share what is important to them. It helps develop their spatial and navigational skills, and independence as they grow.

*Simplify this activity depending on the age group.*



## What you need:

Space - a park or backyard or a couple of blocks in a neighborhood to explore

A3 paper

Crayons or Textas

Time and imagination!

## What to do:

+ Find a place where children can explore freely, either alone or with their parent or carer (depending on age and terrain)

+ Invite children to explore the area and draw a map so that they can always find their way

+ Invite the children to sit down and discuss the map of the area they have explored - Are there any key locations or things included in their map, and why?

+ If the child has finished the map, go on a walk together and let the children share and explain what they see around them





**Tip!**

Take chalk to mark the route with symbols

**Why not try this?**

Use a compass to include a real north arrow in the map

Discuss how the sun and shadows can help find the way

You can map any journey in the child's daily life, e.g. from home to kindy – best journeys are by foot so they can explore on their own terms, e.g slowly, with stops

Explore other maps together: the map of Australia, other continents, the map of the world. Where are you on this map? Have a look at Google earth together

When you have a play date, share your map with others. Do they use the same route?

# Recycled Seed Paper

This sensory activity is a great way to make something new and beautiful from something old. This eco-friendly seed paper, which can be planted directly in the ground, is made from paper scraps and seeds - you can use seeds you have saved. Cut the paper into shapes or tags to give as gifts, or sell the paper when fundraising for your kitchen garden program.

## What to do:

- + Cut or tear the paper into small pieces
- + Place the paper in a bowl and cover with water. Leave to soak for around an hour
- + Transfer a cup of soaked paper to the blender and add enough water to cover it
- + Blend until the paper is a mushy pulp. Transfer the pulp to a bowl, and repeat with the rest of the paper
- + Using a spoon or your hands, mix some seeds into the mushy paper
- + Scoop the mushy paper onto the screen and flatten it down with your hands or the back of a spoon until there is a thin layer. This will help to squeeze the water out, and make sure the seeds are visible - *You might want to do this step outdoors, or over a sink or tray!*
- + Leave the screens out in the sun until the paper has dried completely
- + Gently peel the paper off the screen. You can tear the paper into pieces, or cut it into shapes

## What you need:

Paper scraps (save some paper that would otherwise go in the recycling, like old bills, envelopes, junk mail or unwanted printouts)

Scissors (optional)

Bowls, Water, Cup, Blender, Spoon

Seeds (small, flat seeds work best, e.g. basil, chilli, mint, parsley, radish, thyme, tomato)

Mesh screen (you can use a silk screen, an old window screen, fix cheesecloth tightly in an embroidery hoop or staple mesh screening onto an old frame)



## Recycled Seed Paper Tip!



### Try asking questions like...

Where does paper come from? How is paper made?

What can we do with paper scraps?

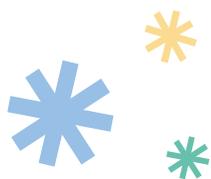
What happens to paper that gets put into the recycling bin? Where does it go?



and later on...



The recycled seed paper can be planted directly in the ground, or in planters or pots. Plant under soil, and keep moist.



# Magical Lands in the Garden

Natural construction is good for physical development - fine and gross motor skills. This activity engages the senses and encourages children to work together, role play, get creative and problem solve.



## Cardboard Cubbies

Collect an assortment of cardboard boxes and sticky tape them together in the shape of a house. The bigger the boxes the better. Decorate with natural materials found in the garden or with paint or textas. This can quickly turn into a work of art and a world of imagination.

## Pixie Villages and Fairy Houses

Find tree hollows, acorns, ferns, leaves, bark flowers, moss, natural items. Create little houses and nooks. Leave notes and make up stories as you go. Bring your toys to come out and play. Narrative structure and role play is a vital building block.

Why not host a mud tea party?

## Mud Tea Party

Mix dirt and water to make your own mud. Set up cake pans, ups/plates/bowl, a teapot or jug. Make cups of pretend tea with water, mud pies, leaf sandwiches or pinecone cupcakes. Serve them in your pretend café. It's all part of the fun and learning.

### What you need:

Natural loose materials such as twigs, rocks, paper, flowers, bark, leaves  
String  
Sticky tape  
Cardboard boxes  
Scissors or Stanley knife (*for parental use only*)  
Textas or paint



# Eco Explorers Bush Playgroup



**“Out here they are climbing logs, jumping in puddles, getting dirty and muddy. They are getting all of those networks firing.”**

Adam, Forest School Leader and playgroup facilitator



Eco Explorers run playgroups and forest kindy sessions across Melbourne as far as the Peninsula and even Phillip Island. They have a team of highly skilled, qualified and experienced playgroup facilitators, forest school leaders, early childhood educators, teachers, environmental scientists and artists who run a unique program that supports hands on learning, unstructured play and optimal early childhood development. This includes supporting the child's physical, social and emotional well-being with a focus on building confidence, coordination, resilience and mindfulness.



*“Children need to be moving. They need exercise and sensory stimuli to develop those healthy and essential brain pathways and they need to take risks. By taking risks children learn about themselves, their bodies and develop resilience, perseverance and confidence,” said Melinda Bitto, founder and Managing Director of Eco Explorers.*

What an inspiring place for a playgroup.

[Click here to discover more about Eco Explorers](#)





# Romp & Stomp

Looking into Nature

**Save the date**

Wednesday 23 October

10am – 2pm



**MELBOURNE  
MUSEUM**



**“My wish is to stay always like this, living quietly in a corner of nature.”**

Claude Monet

### CREDITS

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### ACTIVITY CONTRIBUTIONS

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### PHOTOGRAPHY CONTRIBUTIONS

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### REFERENCES

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PLAYGROUP VICTORIA ACKNOWLEDGES THE TRADITIONAL OWNERS OF COUNTRY THROUGHOUT AUSTRALIA AND THEIR CONTINUING CONNECTION TO LAND, SEA AND COMMUNITY AND WE PAY OUR RESPECT TO THEM, THEIR CULTURES AND TO THE ELDERS PAST AND PRESENT.

Share your nature play ideas with us on Facebook and Instagram!

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