

■ Learning Through Play

Exploring Nature

LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

Chasing fireflies on a warm night, blowing dandelion puffs across the lawn, looking for spider webs in the morning dew — these are all exciting ways for children to discover and explore nature. Share in this wonderful excitement as you encourage your child to develop respect for living things. Rejoice together as he or she encounters the natural beauty of flowers, rainbows, and baby bunnies. Through this discovery process, children learn to observe, compare, classify, predict, and infer. Science skills are enhanced as respect for and involvement in nature grow.



nature's sounds; and help your child understand the pleasure and importance of feeling calm inside.

■ **On With Your Outdoor Investigations!**

As you do the following activities together, encourage your child to verbalize his or her thoughts and observations. Your child will be practicing science skills and both of you will feel closer to nature.

■ **Take a Journey Through Nature**

Whether you live in the city or the country, there are many opportunities for you and your child to experience nature. Start by going outside together and taking a special walk!

■ **Collect treasures.** Use observation skills as you look for wonderful objects. Your child might get excited about gathering pebbles, leaves, or seashells. Together, make wristbands out of masking tape and "wear" some of your treasures. Take them home and have fun sorting and classifying each set into colors, shapes, and other categories.

■ **"Sense" your surroundings.** Talk about our senses and how important they are. Then, together, sniff the fragrances in the air — pine needles, mowed grass, wet earth. Touch soft moss, rough bark, and smooth rocks and talk about the textures. Listen to the sounds of birds singing and rain tapping on your umbrellas.

■ **Watch the birds.** Go to the library for simple bird identification books and then take a birdwatching walk using binoculars. Use observation skills to spot birds and then watch to see if you notice particular birds in the same places every day.

■ **Help preserve the beauty.** If possible, find a special spot to sit quietly and observe nature together. Talk about how the leaves, trees, and grass change; listen to

■ **Get to know bugs.** Children love to observe insects. On warm nights, watch how moths are attracted to lights. During the day, use magnifying glasses to search for grasshoppers and ladybugs. Gently turn over rocks to see what's hiding underneath, then replace them with care.

■ **Learn about growth.** Talk about seeds and how they grow. Look for them in grasses, nut trees, milkweed, fruits, and flowers. Count seeds in tomatoes, oranges, and cucumbers. Then grow grass seed, marigolds, or beans. Help your child predict how long seeds will take to sprout.

■ **Share the sun.** Help your child discover that sunlight warms the earth. Touch different outdoor objects (rocks, branches, grass) in the sun and in the shade. Which ones are warmer? Which are cool? (Just remember not to let your child look directly at the sun.)

Stories to Share

On a clear evening, go outside together and observe the stars. Listen for night sounds. Then come inside and enjoy these books together.

- **Apricot ABC** by M. Miles
- **Birds** by B. Wildsmith
- **The Carrot Seed** by Ruth Krauss
- **In the Woods** by Ermanno Cristini and Luigi Puricelli
- **In the Woods, in the Meadow, in the Sky** by Aileen Fisher
- **Life in the Forest** by Eileen Curran