



## Early Childhood Resources for Nature Play

### **Books and Booklets:**

- Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*, by Richard Louv (Excellent overview of relevant research and new initiatives; very good for parental persuasion)
- Reclaiming Childhood: Letting Children be Children in Our Achievement-Oriented Society*, by William Crain (More persuasion about the value of free play)
- Einstein Never Used Flashcards*, by Kathy Hirsh-Pasek and Roberta Michnick Golinkoff. (A review of how the brain develops, and a strong critique of the commercial "make your baby smarter" industry)
- Plants for Play*, by Robin Moore (Specific suggestions; also plants to avoid)
- A Child's Garden*, by Molly Dannenmaier (Wonderful ideas; great photos)
- The Great Outdoors — Restoring Children's Right to Play Outside*, by Mary Rivkin (Describes the kinds of landscapes children need today)
- Natural Playscapes — Creating Outdoor Play Environments for the Soul*, by Rusty Keeler (Good ideas for early childhood play spaces)
- Nature and Young Children: Encouraging Creative Play and Learning in Natural Environments*, by Ruth Wilson (Advice from one of the early promoters of connecting young children with nature)
- Natural Wonders — A Guide to Early Childhood for Environmental Educators*, edited by Marcie Oltman (Excellent guidance about age-appropriate environmental education for the early childhood years. Download from [http://www.seek.state.mn.us/classrm\\_e.cfm](http://www.seek.state.mn.us/classrm_e.cfm) )
- A Parent's Guide to Nature Play*, by Ken Finch of Green Hearts. (A short introduction to nature play, along with easy suggestions for how to "kidscape" home landscapes. Download from [www.greenheartsinc.org](http://www.greenheartsinc.org) )
- Nature Play — Simple and Fun Ideas for All*, by the Forestry Commission England. Great and practical suggestions; download from [www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-7LSEHW](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-7LSEHW) )

### **Websites:**

- Children and Nature Network — The best "one-stop" site for research on nature play, new initiatives, etc. [www.childrenandnature.org](http://www.childrenandnature.org)
- The Natural Learning Initiative — good ideas and models from Robin Moore's project at North Carolina State University: [www.naturalllearning.org](http://www.naturalllearning.org)
- Planet Earth Playscapes — landscape design for natural playgrounds: [www.planetearthplayscapes.com](http://www.planetearthplayscapes.com)
- Natural Playgrounds — more landscape design: [www.naturalplaygrounds.com](http://www.naturalplaygrounds.com)
- Green Hour — a National Wildlife Federation initiative with good ideas and activities: [www.greenhour.org](http://www.greenhour.org)
- Green Hearts Institute for Nature in Childhood — good background information, plus design and consulting assistance: [www.greenheartsinc.org](http://www.greenheartsinc.org)
- Nature Rocks — suggestions and information for getting families and children back outside and playing: [www.naturerocks.org](http://www.naturerocks.org)
- Nature Explore — a project of the Arbor Day Foundation and Dimensions Foundation: [www.arborday.org/explore](http://www.arborday.org/explore).
- Growing Up Wild — a new curriculum for early childhood: <http://projectwild.org/GrowingUpWild.htm>.

### **Connections:**

- National Association for the Education of Young Children — national, state, and local affiliates, with a wealth of information and networking: [www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org)
- Universities with programs in early childhood education
- Resource and referral agencies — many areas have these local, regional, or statewide organizations that provide training and development opportunities for the early childhood profession
- State Departments of Education — most have early childhood offices and programs
- Head Start programs — federally supported programs in all major cities.

### Connections, continued

Local school districts — many have preschools and early childhood enrichment programs, and most also offer after-school programming for elementary students.

Pediatricians — many are endorsing nature play as a great way to improve physical fitness while simultaneously supporting a wide range of other developmental needs.

### Local Information and Advice:

Community nature centers, natural history museums, zoos, botanic gardens, and arboretums — all are good sources for advice about natural landscapes and how to use them with young children.

Your state Extension Service (Their Master Gardeners program can provide advice and possibly hands-on assistance. In addition, now operating in some states are Master Naturalists programs, which can also help with volunteer advice and support.)

Local park districts and natural resource districts

Garden centers and nurseries

### Help with Creating Areas for Nature Play:

Child care center parents — always a great source of skills, dedication, and interest!

Garden clubs — they often provide volunteer community service

Eagle Scout projects (Boy Scouts of America) — all Eagle Scouts must plan and implement a community service project; nature play spaces could offer multiple opportunities! Girl Scout troops also take on some extensive community projects.

High school or community college programs in construction and horticulture — these sometimes look for real-world projects to help their students gain skills and experience

"Day of Service" volunteer programs which are often sponsored by colleges and universities.

Service clubs (Kiwanis, Rotary, Elks, etc.) — most of these do periodic community service projects, and can bring a lot of skills and influence to bear; many of them also provide funding support for local projects

Tree services and garden centers — a great source for large logs (cut down due to storm damage, etc.), mulch, advice, and even direct assistance

Landscape architecture programs at local colleges and universities — their students sometimes look for design projects to practice on.

### Funding Support:

Businesses with a local store will often support modest community projects. Walmart, Lowe's, and Home Depot are among the large ones that have funded school gardens and outdoor learning centers.

Local community foundations usually have funds available for creative and interesting projects, and can provide great connections to private donors and other foundations.

Park districts and natural resource districts often have small grant-making programs for outdoor classrooms, naturalistic landscaping, and the like

Child care center parents may be willing and able to make significant individual donations, plus many of them work at corporations and businesses that could provide funds and/or volunteer support. Ask!

## **Green Hearts Institute for Nature in Childhood**

**Green Hearts is a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to restoring and strengthening the bonds between children and nature.**

**We speak, write, teach, and consult about the power of nature play, and how it can be returned to childhood. We are also currently developing our first unique facility — a children's nature center in the Omaha suburb of Papillion.**

*Sharing offices with Big Muddy Workshop, Inc.*

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