

We Skoolhouse

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# Ready-Made Curriculum: Nature Exploration



# A Practical Guide for Exploration

Each unit offers a suggested flow of experiences designed to support deep, meaningful learning through play. You'll notice intentional repetition—this is purposeful. Repeating activities builds memory, mastery, confidence, attention, and focus, forming the foundation for long-term learning.

The experiences are open-ended & process-driven, focusing on how children learn rather than what they produce. This allows for a range of learning styles & encourages exploration at each child's unique pace.

## Flexibility Matters

Each unit includes a suggested daily activity guide to support your planning—but it's not meant to be followed rigidly or completed in a set order:

- **Follow the children's lead:** If they're deeply engaged, slow down. If interest fades, it's okay to pause and return later. Some children need time to warm up to new ideas—don't move on too quickly. Repeating an invitation over several days can spark richer engagement.
- **Move at your own pace:** Stretch a week into two, repeat activities as long as needed, and allow units to grow over time.
- **Revisit, don't rush:** There's no need to introduce a new unit each month. Returning to a familiar concept—like revisiting water after exploring texture or paint—deepens understanding and strengthens memory. Revisiting isn't starting over—it's going further.

**This guide is about making space for curiosity, experimentation, and meaningful learning. Use it as a springboard—trust yourself, trust the children, and allow learning to unfold naturally.**



# Unit: Nature Exploration

Nature offers endless opportunities for toddlers to explore, observe, and connect with the world around them. Engaging with natural materials such as sticks, stones, and leaves builds sensory awareness, physical coordination, and a sense of wonder. Along with indoor activities and experiences, be sure to get children outside and into the elements as much as possible.

Domain	How It Supports Development
<b>Physical</b>	Develops gross motor skills and balance through climbing, running, and navigating uneven terrain. Fine motor coordination is strengthened through picking up sticks, stones, or leaves.
<b>Cognitive</b>	Sparks curiosity and problem-solving as toddlers observe insects, explore cause and effect (e.g., dropping a leaf into water), and begin to understand natural cycles and patterns.
<b>Language</b>	Expands descriptive and functional vocabulary through sensory-rich experiences. Repeated labeling of natural phenomena enhances language comprehension and encourages expressive language.
<b>Social-Emotional</b>	Fosters independence, resilience, and self-regulation. Nature provides open-ended challenges (e.g., uneven ground, sticks that won't balance) that build confidence and frustration tolerance in toddlers.

# Unit: Nature Exploration

**Focus Materials:** Leaves, sticks, rocks, dirt, flower petals, pinecones, bark pieces, scoops, small baskets, sensory bins, paint, scrub brushes

**Books:** Tap the Magic Tree by Christie Matheson, Planting a Rainbow by Lois Ehlert

**Songs:** "The Green Grass Grows All Around," & "Mister Sun"

**Vocabulary:** Leaf, flower, tree, grass, sky, wind, sun, rain, puddle, cloud, dirt, mud, rock, branch, bird, bug, squirrel, breeze, nest, pinecone

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Week 1	Nature Walk & Collection	Stick & Leaf Painting	Nature Walk & Collection	Rock Washing Station	Rock Washing Station
Week 2	Natural Materials Basket	Nature Walk & Collection	Stick & Leaf Painting	Mud Kitchen Play	Mud Kitchen Play
Week 3	Rock Washing Station	Nature Walk & Collection	Natural Materials Collage	Natural Materials Collage	Stick & Leaf Painting
Week 4	Nature Walk & Collection	Natural Materials Basket	Rock Washing Station	Mud Kitchen Play	Mud Kitchen Play

# Unit: Nature Exploration

## Suggested Activities

- **Nature Walk & Collection:** Toddlers explore outdoors and collect natural treasures like leaves, sticks, rocks, and flowers using small baskets or bags. Builds observation, language, and sensory engagement.
- **Leaf & Stick Painting:** Use leaves or sticks as tools to paint, or paint directly on them. Encourages creativity, fine motor skills, and texture exploration with natural materials.
- **Rock Washing Station:** Toddlers scrub and rinse rocks in a bin of water using sponges or brushes. A calming, sensory-rich activity that builds coordination and care.
- **Natural Materials Basket:** Fill a basket with safe natural items like pinecones, bark, dried leaves, and seed pods. Toddlers freely explore textures, weights, and sounds using all their senses.
- **Mud Kitchen Pretend Play:** Toddlers mix dirt, water, leaves, and flowers using spoons, bowls, and pots to “cook.”
  - **Outdoor:** Ideal for open-ended messy play with real mud and nature items.
  - **Indoor:** Use soil or alternatives like kinetic sand on a tray with pretend kitchen tools.
- **Natural Materials Collage:** Toddlers glue collected nature items onto cardboard or thick paper. Focus is on arranging, pressing, and exploring how materials stick—supporting creativity and sensory learning.



# Unit: Nature Exploration

## Alternatives and Extensions:

Explore these simple variations to extend play, supporting repetition, variety, and deeper sensory learning:

- **Leaf Rubbings:** Place leaves under paper and use the side of a crayon to rub across the top, revealing the leaf's shape and veins. Builds fine motor control and awareness of texture.
- **Flower Petal Soup:** Provide a large bowl or bin with water, flower petals, leaves, and ladles. Toddlers mix, scoop, and pretend to "cook," combining sensory and imaginative play.
- **Pinecone Rolling Art:** Dip pinecones in paint and roll them across paper to create colorful prints. A great mix of movement, art, and exploration of natural textures.
- **Little Gardener:** Planting & Care: Toddlers dig small holes, plant seeds or flowers, and gently water them. Builds responsibility, patience, and a connection to growing things.
- **Nature on Sticky Contact Paper:** Tape clear contact paper sticky-side-up on a tray, table, wall, window. Offer natural materials (leaves, petals, bark, grass) for toddlers to stick on, creating a textured nature collage.

