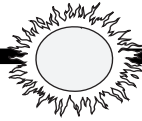


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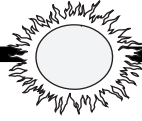
Introduction

The world is an enormous place, from the tiniest insects to the largest trees, from the backyard to the most distant stars. The number of things to explore in nature is infinite. Children are natural-born scientists, constantly asking questions about the world they see. *Exploring Nature* will give you many ways to enjoy the beauty of nature with your young child.

As we introduce our children to all aspects of nature, we develop their curiosity, and we help take away their fear of the unknown. The younger the individual, the more you can help the child become familiar and comfortable with nature. You can also help your child develop a love for the outdoors in all its detail.

Nature gives you resources; *Exploring Nature* gives you ideas; and you provide opportunities. Your child's love for the world will flourish as a result. Get out your magnifying glass and collecting tools and enjoy the beauty of land, sky, and water through the eyes of a preschooler.





Going on a Nature Walk

Going on any kind of walk is an adventure for a preschooler. Strolling a mountain path, country orchard, or sandy beach, however, is a special experience. If your preschooler has experiences such as these, he or she is likely to grow up with fond and significant memories of nature. Here are some ways you can make walks in nature more purposeful and memorable, as well as a gentle teaching experience.

Hunt for a specific item. If you know that crimson rosellas or sulphur-crested cockatoos are dominant in your area, describe them to your child, and then search for them. Look in trees, on flowers and bushes, and in the air. Even if you don't find one, you will enjoy the journey.

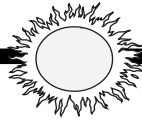
Look for patterns in nature. Look for shapes in or on objects; you may be surprised how many shapes you and your child can find, such as those made by branches crossed in a tree. Pattern walks also work well. A pebble thrown into a stream makes concentric circles, while ants march in an orderly line. You will enjoy pointing out the world's unique beauty, while your child will be in wonder at how the world is arranged.

Do a colour search. Try looking for red items in nature, for example. Visual exploration games like this are good for introducing critical thinking skills to your preschooler.

Make up your own pattern. Find one possum, two sparrows, three pansies, four gum trees, etc. As a variation, look for just five of an item, or let your child decide how many of each object you will find together.

Collect treasures. Remember when you were five and a yellow leaf or a pigeon feather was as exciting as a trip to the zoo? In our high-tech society, we sometimes forget that nature is its own reward for children. Help your child discover some treasures on your walk, and it won't be long before he or she is adding to the collection. (See page 152 for ideas on storing nature collections.)





Seed Deeds

Studying seeds with preschoolers is fascinating—how can an entire apple tree grow from a seed smaller than a fingernail? Many young children know where seeds come from, but the cycle of seed-to-plant-to-fruit-to-seed eludes them. Be sure to explain this cycle as you eat fruit or find a seed pod during a walk.



The seed actually contains almost all of the parts it needs to become the plant it is supposed to be; it only requires sunlight, earth, and water to help it along. Prove this to your child by soaking a bean for a couple of hours, and then pulling it open with your fingernail. What you will see are the beginnings of a little plant. Some fun questions to ask include the following:

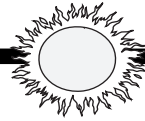
- How do you think a tiny seed becomes a big tree?
- Why do fruits and vegetables have so many seeds inside of them?
- What do you think is the biggest seed? (The answer to this one is on page 16, in case you yourself don't know.)

Where to Go

The natural time to discover and investigate seeds is during the spring and autumn months. Spring is when most seeds sprout. Anywhere you walk in nature, you will find seeds or things that come from seeds. Ask your child, How do you think this plant got here? What do you think is under the ground?

During the autumn months, you will find empty pods from trees that will be fun to look at through a magnifying glass. In fact, because seeds are so small, a magnifying glass is a piece of science equipment that should be used with every seed activity.

At nurseries, study flower seed packets with your child. Explain that you can't just buy seeds because the plant pictured on the package is pretty. You have to consider the environment for each flower and plant. Some need lots of sun, while others need very little. Explain that growing flowers and plants can be very complicated because each one needs just the right type of earth and the right amount of sun and water to grow.



What to Do

Grow Your Own Seedlings

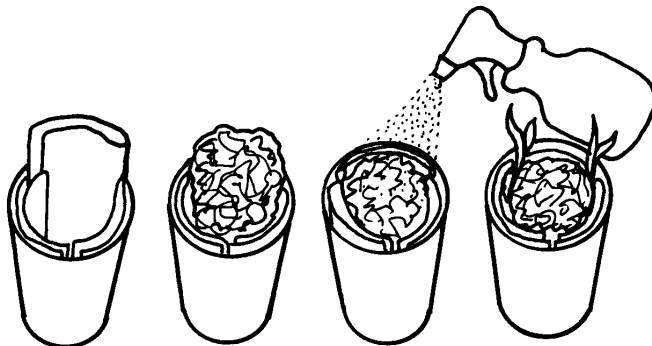
To prove seeds contain plants, you can do this magical experiment.

Materials

- clear plastic cup
- paper towels
- beans
- water

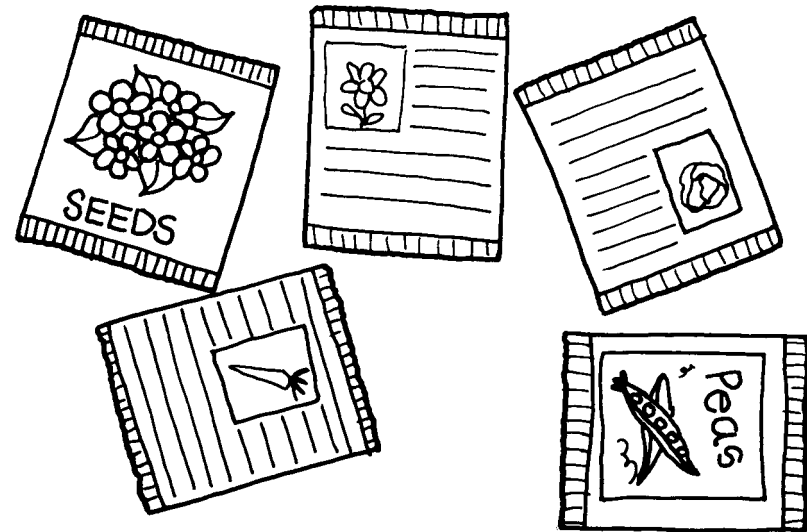
Directions

Fold a few paper towels and put them around the inside of the cup. Stuff a balled paper towel into the centre. Place a couple of large beans around the sides between the paper towels and the cup. (For best results, soak the beans for a couple of hours prior to putting them in the cup.) Dampen the paper towels, and keep them damp over the next week or so while the seeds begin to sprout. When the seedlings begin to form leaves, pull the seedlings out and plant them in your garden.



Play Seed Packet Concentration

This is a new twist on the old game of concentration that your child will quickly learn to play. Show your child pairs of flower, fruit, and vegetable seed packets. Mix them up and lay them upside down on the floor. Your child will pick them up two at a time until he or she has a match. Play until all packets have been matched. (Remind your gardening friends to save their empty packets for you.)



What Else?

Read the book *The Carrot Seed* by Ruth Krauss. Children love this simple book, especially when the young main character is right and no one else thinks he will be.