

Loose Parts, Nature Play

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“Loose Parts, Nature Play”

Bringing nature to every child, everywhere

Schoolyard Habitat Workshop
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What is “Loose Parts, Nature Play”?

- Children are invited to engage in unstructured outdoor play with a collection of nature materials
- One Time Activity or Permanent Play and Learning Setting
- Materials include natural items such as bamboo poles, sticks, “tree cookies,” pine cones, shells, and palm fronds, sheets, and twine.



Photo by Janice Swaisgood

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Why “Loose Parts, Nature Play”?

Research indicates that unstructured outdoor play:

- Increases physical activity
- Improves motor skills
- Reduces stress
- Lessens attention disorder behaviors
- Increases self-esteem
- Improves psychological health



Photo by Merideth French

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Why “Loose Parts, Nature Play”?

Loose Parts, Nature Play.....

- Is an alternative to our technology-saturated lifestyle
- Can be done almost anywhere
- Encourages creative play and cooperation
- Opens the classroom walls
- Allows children to engage with the natural world



Photo by Ilisa Goldman

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How “Loose Parts, Nature Play”?

Location

- Whether you have an open field, garden setting, or an asphalt lot, Loose Parts, Nature Play can be done almost anywhere.
- Make sure there is enough clear space to build and use the loose parts.



Photo by Merideth French

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How “Loose Parts, Nature Play”?

Time Frame

- One-time activity vs. permanent play component
- Typically 30-45 minutes for preschoolers.
- 1 Hour + for many school age children
- Make sure you give the children enough time to really get creative and used to the materials.



Photo by Marianne Reiner

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How “Loose Parts, Nature Play”?

Suggested Rules

- No Hitting, throwing, fighting
- Once you are finished building something and are no longer playing, it can be taken down by another
- Ask an adult or teacher for help if needed



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Considerations “Loose Parts, Nature Play”?

Choking Hazards

- Some natural loose parts, such as nuts, seeds and small stones, are small enough to be a choking hazard for small children and are not recommended for toddlers.

Poisonous Plants

- The parts of some plants are poisonous and should not be within the outdoor learning environment.



Photo by Ilisa Goldman

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Where to Begin? The DIY Option

Materials

- May vary with seasons
- May be on your school site
- May need to be brought in
- Loose Parts may vary with region and setting



Photo by Merideth French

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Where to Begin? The DIY Option

Suggested amount for a site serving 20 children:

- 20 -30 bamboo poles
- 10-15 tree cookies
- 30- 40 pinecones
- 20-30 branches
- 10 -15 cardboard boxes
- 10 -15 sheet/blankets
- 1 roll twine
- 5 child safety scissors (depends on age range)
- 1-2 pair of adult scissors
- 20 Magnifying Glasses
- Shells
- Broom and/or rake for clean up

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Where to Begin? The DIY Option

Other Loose Parts materials:

- bark wedges
- straw bales
- small stones
- log stumps
- leaves
- seeds
- nuts
- flowers
- wood chips



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Where to get Loose Parts?

Make Contacts!

- Local arborists (San Diego Certified Arborist)
- Landscape contractors
- Landscape maintenance companies
- Neighbors with yards, gardens and farms.

Make a List of Collectors!



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Let Us Help You!

- **One-time demonstration fee: \$250**
 - Maintenance and storage of materials
 - Transportation, set-up and removal of materials
 - On-site support (about 3 hours of program time)
 - Evaluation and follow-up
- **Loose Parts Package to be left at School: \$500**
 - Purchase and transport of materials
 - First visit and two follow-up meetings
 - Oversight/program management

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Educator Training



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Educator Training



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RESOURCES

Websites

- "Increasing Focus Through Loose Parts, Exploring the Outdoor Classroom. 2011.
www.exploringtheoutdoorclassroom.blogspot.com/2011/11/increasing-focus-through-loose-parts.html
- "Loose Parts - Natural Play Spaces Elements - Children In Nature", Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Maryland Partnership for Children in Nature
www.dnr.state.md.us/cin/nps/Loose_Parts.asp
- The Children and Nature Network. www.childrenandnature.org
- The Natural Learning Initiative. www.naturalearning.org

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RESOURCES

Books and Publications

- Moore, Robin. "Outdoor Settings for Playing and Learning: Designing School Grounds to Meet the Needs of the Whole Child and Whole Curriculum." *The NAMTA Journal*, Vol. 21, No 3 (Summer 1996): 97-120.
- The Natural Learning Initiative, North Carolina State University. 2009. *Creating and Retrofitting Play Environments: Best Practice Guidelines*. Raleigh, NC: Playcore, Inc.

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RESOURCES

Books and Publications

- Cosco and Moore. "Greening Montessori School Grounds By Design: *The NAMTA Journal*, Vol. 32, No 1 (Winter 2007): 129-150.
- Danks, Sharon. 2010. *Asphalt to Ecosystems. Design Ideas for Schoolyard Transformation*. Oakland, CA. New Village Press.
- Marcus and Moore. 2008. "Healthy Planet, Healthy Children: Designing Nature into the Daily Spaces of Childhood" Chapter 10 in *Biophilic design: the theory, science, and practice of bringing buildings to life*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Publications.

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