“Loose Parts, Nature Play”

Bringing nature to every child, everywhere

Schoolyard Habitat Workshop
August 2013

By Ilisa Goldman, MLA, RLA
San Diego Children and Nature Collaborative

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.

Why “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

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 Janice Swaisgood

Photo by Ilisa Goldman

Presented at Schoolyard Habitat Workshop
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.

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.

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

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.
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

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)

Other Loose Parts materials:
• bark wedges
• straw bales
• small stones
• log stumps
• leaves
• seeds
• nuts
• flowers
• wood chips

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!
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

Educator Training

RESOURCES

**Websites**

- "Increasing Focus Through Loose Parts, Exploring the Outdoor Classroom. 2011."  

- "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 Natural Learning Initiative. www.naturallearning.org
RESOURCES

Books and Publications


