

EXPLORE • CREATE • BUILD

Learning Lab Educator Guide – Session 3

Theme: Nature & Outdoor-Inspired Play

Explore – Nature Discovery Bins

Create – Nature Mark Making

Build – Loose Parts Nature Construction

EXPLORE

Nature Discovery Bins

Purpose

Supports observation skills, early science, sensory exploration, and language development through natural materials.

Educator Setup Guide

1. Prepare the Space

- Table or outdoor area
- Use shallow bins or trays

2. Add Natural Materials

- Leaves, sticks, pinecones, rocks, grass
- Rotate materials to maintain interest

3. Add Simple Tools

- Magnifying glasses
- Tweezers (older groups)
- Small containers

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4. Introduce Curiosity

"I wonder what we can find or notice?"

Age Group Adaptations

12–18 Months

Materials

- Large leaves, sticks, soft natural items

Focus

- Sensory exploration
- Cause and effect

Educator Language "Soft." "Rough." "Look."

Family Update: Today we explored natural materials to support sensory development and early curiosity. Children touched and examined different textures, building awareness of the world around them.

19 Months–Under 3 Years

Materials

- Mixed natural items
- Containers

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Focus

- Sorting
- Language development
- Observation

Educator Language "What do you see?" "Can you find another one?"

Family Update: Children explored nature materials while building observation skills and vocabulary. Sorting and comparing items supports early science learning and language development.

3-4 Years

Materials

- Variety of natural items
- Magnifying tools

Focus

- Classification
- Scientific thinking
- Inquiry

Educator Language "What's different?" "Why do you think that?"

Family Update: Today children investigated natural materials, comparing textures and features. This supports early science skills, critical thinking, and curiosity.

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CREATE

Nature Mark Making

Purpose

Builds creativity, fine motor control, and connection to the environment through process art.

Educator Setup Guide

1. Prepare Surface

- Paper on table or outdoors
- Optional: clipboards

2. Offer Tools

- Leaves, sticks, pinecones
- Paint or water

3. Model Use

- Press, drag, roll materials

4. Encourage Exploration

Focus on process, not product

Age Group Adaptations

12–18 Months

Focus

- Sensory exploration
- Gross motor movement

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19 Months–Under 3 Years

Focus

- Controlled movement
- Exploration of textures

Family Update Children used natural materials to create marks, building coordination and creative expression.

3–4 Years

Focus

- Creativity
- Planning
- Fine motor refinement

Family Update: Today children explored creative expression using natural tools, strengthening fine motor skills and artistic confidence.

BUILD

Loose Parts Nature Construction

Purpose

Supports problem-solving, planning, and engineering thinking using open-ended materials.

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Educator Setup Guide

1. Create a Defined Space

- Mat or table

2. Provide Loose Parts

- Sticks, rocks, pinecones
- Small logs or blocks

3. Invite Building

"What can you create?"

Age Group Adaptations

12–18 Months

Focus

- Stacking
- Exploration

Family Update: Children explored stacking and building with natural materials, strengthening coordination and curiosity.

19 Months–Under 3 Years

Focus

- Simple structures
- Problem-solving

Family Update: Children experimented with building using natural materials, supporting problem-solving and coordination.

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3–4 Years

Focus

- Planning
- Engineering concepts
- Collaboration

Family Update: Today children designed and built structures using loose parts, strengthening problem-solving, planning, and teamwork skills.