

TAKE IT
OUTSIDE!



10 Play Space Projects That Also Enhance the Environment

Did You Know?

About 9 percent of the U.S. population — or 7.6 million children between ages 1 and 21 — is deficient in Vitamin D. Increasing children's time outdoors can raise their levels of Vitamin D, the Sunshine Vitamin.

Enhancing the environment at your center not only will increase children's physical activity but also will raise their Vitamin D levels.



1. Build a Sunflower House. Plant sunflowers in a square, circle or any other shape you'd like to create a living playhouse for hiding and hanging out.

2. Willow Dome. Create a permanent "living" room for children to play in outdoors by planting willow. Plant it in the winter so that when spring comes, the willow will start sprouting new roots and leaves.

3. Mow a Meadow Maze. Create a fun, natural play space for your children by letting your lawn grow, then carving out a maze or zigzag path with the lawnmower.

4. Plant Some Bulbs. Watching flower bulbs emerge provides a strange and mysterious experience for children. Plant the bulbs in strategic, fun ways that act as colorful accents to your play space features and pathways.

5. Boom Drums. Use plastic barrels and trim them to whatever size you want. Bolt them to the ground — or don't — and let kids bang on them.

* Find instructions for those projects and more in *Natural Playscapes* (2008, Exchange Press), by Rusty Keeler. Find a 26-page excerpt, including the above do-it-yourself playscape projects, at store.earthplay.net.

6. Pumpkins. Place small pumpkins outside for children to touch, carry and explore. Encourage them to take turns carrying and pushing the pumpkins in a wheel barrel.

7. Loose Parts. Use blocks, boards, "tree cookies" (log slices) and milk crates for outdoor construction play. Give children chalk, fabric, paintbrushes or water for enhanced imaginative play.

8. Build a Vine Teepee. Add a hideaway to children's play space and naturalize their outdoor environment. Find do-it-yourself instructions at www.naturalearning.org.

9. Color. Brighten and create a welcoming environment by adding painted rocks, mosaic stepping stones, windsocks or pinwheels to your play space.

10. Recycled Materials. Add some cardboard boxes or pipes for construction play. Add tins, buckets or bottles for children to bang on to create music and movement opportunities. Use your imagination.