

Children and Nature

By Colleen Gengler, Family Relations Educator,
University of Minnesota Extension

Children need to be outdoors and in nature. Recently, there's been more and more attention paid to this. Being outdoors and in green space is very beneficial to healthy child development. Being outside on the grass, amidst the flowers and underneath trees allows for more creative play and can have a calming effect on children. Some studies are starting to show that being outdoors in nature relieves the symptoms of ADHD. For example, ADHD kids are better able to concentrate, complete tasks and follow directions after playing in natural settings.

What can child care providers do? Consider some of these ideas for summer:

- Grow flowers or vegetables in wooden planter boxes. Have children do the planting. Children can check for progress.
- Think differently about the weather. "There is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing." Encourage parents to provide boots and raincoats as needed. Or, visit a used clothing store or garage sales and keep a stash on hand.
- Go on "I Spy" walks in the neighborhood. Look for the simple things; how a plant grows through sidewalk cracks, bark on different trees, ant hills or birds singing.
- Create a worm bin. Use a large galvanized metal bucket and stock with dirt and worms. Allowing children to feed, handle and touch worms helps overcome fears of some common things in nature.
- Avoid scaring children by discussing big environmental issues such as global warming. Keep discussions appropriate to the ages of the children. Plan activities that children can understand and do.

Lastly, share with the children what you enjoy in nature!

Source: Young Children – Journal of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. January 2008.