

# Outdoor Earth Day Activities



Outdoor play builds **gross motor skills, curiosity, language, confidence, and self-regulation**. Use these activities in a yard, playground, park, or even a small outdoor space. Choose what fits your setting and always adjust for weather and safety.

## Infants (Birth–12 months)

### 1) Blanket Nature Time

**Materials:** blanket, a few safe items (soft ball, teether), optional: bubbles (adult only)

**Setup:** Place blanket in shade; position baby on back/tummy/supported sit.

**Directions:**

1. Sit close and describe what the baby sees/hears: “I hear birds.” “Leaves are moving.”
2. Hold a leaf or flower *out of reach* and say: “Look—green!”
3. Give the baby time to watch the sky/trees (30–90 seconds).
4. End with gentle stretches or a cuddle.

**Tip:** This is perfect as a calm break between more active outdoor play for older kids.

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### 2) Breeze & Scarf Sensory Play

**Materials:** lightweight scarf or ribbon (adult holds), shaded spot

**Directions:**

1. Hold the scarf above the baby and move it slowly with the breeze.
2. Say: “Up... down... soft... wave.”
3. Let the baby reach and grasp briefly (supervised).



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4. Switch sides to encourage turning head and tracking.

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### 3) Outdoor “Roll & Reach”

**Materials:** soft ball

**Directions:**

1. Place the baby at tummy time on a mat/blanket.
2. Roll the ball slowly in front (not too far).
3. Encourage reaching: “Can you touch it?”
4. Celebrate effort: “You reached!”

**Safety:** Keep baby away from direct sun and always supervise.

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## Young Toddlers (1–2 years)

### 1) Sidewalk Chalk Scribble Zone

**Materials:** chunky sidewalk chalk, space to draw

**Directions:**

1. Demonstrate: “Draw a line... big circle... dot-dot-dot.”
2. Let toddlers scribble freely.
3. Add simple prompts: “Can you make a big line?” “Find your red chalk.”
4. Optional: draw a simple road and push toy cars along it.

**Tip:** Toddlers love “erase” play—give a damp cloth to wipe chalk.



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## 2) Bubble Chase & Pause

**Materials:** bubbles

**Directions:**

1. Blow bubbles and invite children to pop them.
2. Add an attention cue: “Ready... set... STOP!” (pause blowing)
3. Praise listening: “You stopped your feet!”

**Safety:** Keep bubble solution away from mouths; wash hands after.

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## 3) Nature Basket Walk

**Materials:** small bucket/basket, optional picture card of “leaf/rock/stick”

**Directions:**

1. Give each child a bucket.
2. Say: “Let’s find 3 leaves!” (or 2 rocks, 1 stick).
3. Walk slowly and collect together.
4. End by dumping items in a “nature pile” and looking at them.

**Tip:** Use “Look, don’t pick” for living plants/flowers.

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## 4) Water Paint

**Materials:** cup/bucket of water, large paintbrushes, sidewalk/fence

**Directions:**



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1. Show: “Paint with water—watch it disappear!”
2. Toddlers brush water on concrete or a wooden fence.
3. Add words: “wet/dry,” “big/small,” “up/down.”

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## Older Toddlers (2–3 years)

### 1) Obstacle Path

**Materials:** cones or buckets, hula hoops, chalk, a small step or low balance beam (optional)

**Directions:**

1. Set 3–5 stations: walk around cones, jump in hoop, tiptoe on chalk line, toss beanbag in bucket.
2. Demonstrate once slowly.
3. Send children one at a time or in spaced-out turns.
4. Use short cues: “Around... jump... tiptoe... toss!”

**Tip:** Keep it short and repeatable. Toddlers love doing the same path again.

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### 2) “Animal Walk” Trail

**Materials:** none (optional animal picture cards)

**Directions:**

1. Call an animal: “Walk like a bear!”
2. Move 10 steps, then switch: “Hop like a bunny!”
3. Add “freeze” moments to practice control.



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4. Finish with a slow “turtle walk” to calm.

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### 3) Ball Ramp Outdoors

**Materials:** cardboard piece or gutter, a crate/table to prop it, balls

**Directions:**

1. Prop cardboard to create a ramp.
2. Show: “Roll the ball from the top.”
3. Let children take turns.
4. Ask simple questions: “Fast or slow?” “Which ball goes farther?”

**Safety:** Keep the landing zone clear so kids aren’t hit in the face.

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### 4) Nature Color Match

**Materials:** color cards (red/green/brown/yellow) or colored paper squares

**Directions:**

1. Give each child a card.
2. Say: “Find something that matches your color!”
3. Children point or bring a safe item (like a fallen leaf).
4. Share matches in a circle.

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## Preschool (3–5 years)



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## 1) Nature Scavenger Hunt

**Materials:** simple picture list (leaf, rock, bug, cloud), clipboard (optional), crayons

**Directions:**

1. Review the pictures together.
2. Walk and find items; kids check off by drawing a circle or scribble.
3. For living things, practice “look only” and observe gently.
4. End with a sharing circle: “What did you find?”

**Extension:** Count how many leaves vs. rocks.

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## 2) Shadow Tracing

**Materials:** sidewalk chalk, a sunny area, toys/leaves/children’s shadows

**Directions:**

1. Place an object in the sun and trace its shadow.
2. Return later and trace again.
3. Compare: “Did it move? Bigger or smaller?”
4. Kids decorate inside the shadow outline.

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## 3) Outdoor Story Walk

**Materials:** picture cards or pages from a familiar story (laminated), tape/clips

**Directions:**

1. Post pages/cards along a path.



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2. Walk to each “stop,” read the page, and do a motion.
3. Example motions: stomp like the character, tiptoe quietly, roar softly.
4. Finish at the last page and cheer.

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#### **4) “Build a Bug Hotel”**

**Materials:** small cardboard box or milk crate, sticks, pinecones, leaves (fallen), paper towel tubes

**Directions:**

1. Explain: “Some insects like safe places to hide.”
2. Fill the box with sticks/leaves/tubes (no digging, no catching insects).
3. Place it in a quiet corner.
4. Observe from a distance over days/weeks.

**Safety:** Wash hands after handling nature items. Avoid areas with stinging insects.

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### **School Age (6+)**

#### **1) Outdoor Team Challenge: Build a Shelter**

**Materials:** tarp or old sheet, clips/clothespins, rope (adult supervised), sticks, cones

**Directions:**

1. Set boundaries and safety rules (no climbing trees, no tying around necks).
2. Team's plan: “What do we need: roof, walls, entrance?”
3. Build and test: does it block wind/sun?



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4. Reflect: "What worked? What would you change?"

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## 2) Nature Journaling

**Materials:** notebook, pencil, optional magnifier

**Directions:**

1. Choose a "sit spot" for 5 minutes.
2. Write/draw: 3 things you see, 2 you hear, 1 you feel.
3. Add a question: "I wonder..."
4. Share in pairs.

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## 3) Outdoor Fitness Stations

**Materials:** cones, timer

**Directions:**

1. Set 5 stations: jumping jacks, balance line, hopscotch, sprint to cone, wall sit (short).
2. Do 30 seconds each, rotate.
3. End with a cool-down: slow breathing, stretch, water.

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## 4) Neighborhood Clean-Up + Data

**Materials:** gloves, trash bags, sanitizer, clipboard

**Directions:**

1. Review safety: adults handle sharp/unknown items.



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2. Clean for 10–20 minutes with partners.
3. Count types of litter (paper/plastic/other) and make a simple tally chart.
4. Discuss solutions: “How can our community make less trash?”



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