

# Exploring Nature With Infants and Toddlers



Exploring nature with infants and toddlers provides for learning in all areas of development. Young children explore through their senses and are very aware of the environment around them.

Exploration of the natural world provides wonderful opportunities to introduce new vocabulary, enhance observation skills, encourage natural math and science concepts, incorporate literacy, and bring about an awareness of caring for our earth.

Nature-based learning is a great way to explore shapes, colors, textures, scents and sounds. As the seasons change, the natural world provides an abundant array of learning experiences.

## Recommended Nature and Science Materials

Based on the Infant-Toddler Environment Rating Scale

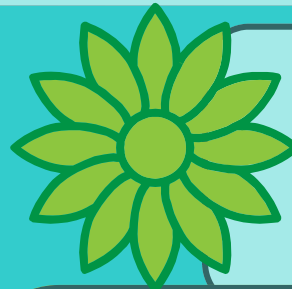
### Nature and Science Books

- Pictures That Represent Nature Realistically
- Home-Made Picture Books

### Nature and Science Materials

(used with supervision)

- Magnifying Lenses
- Shaker Science Bottles
- Nature Materials in Clear Containers (grass, soil, mulch, pebbles, sand)
- Real Science Materials (pine cones, leaves, flowers, large smooth rocks, large smooth shells, large pieces of mulch, branches, bird nests)
- Planted Seeds



### Living Things

- Pets
- Aquariums
- House Plants
- Grow A Garden

### Nature and Science Toys

- Realistic Animal Figurines
- Puzzles With Realistic Nature or Science Content
- Realistic Plastic Fruits and Vegetables
- Picture Cards of Animals and Nature
- Mobiles With Realistic Birds, Butterflies or Animals
- Sensory Tables—Fill With Dirt, Sand, Mulch, Leaves, Water, Snow, Grass

# Rocks and Water Painting



## Suggested Materials:

- Large, smooth rocks or stones
- Paint brushes
- Water containers
- Water
- Art trays (or similar containers)

Allow the children to paint the rocks with water.

Notice how the color of the rocks changes when wet (different than when they are dry); then how it changes when they are dry again.

What else do you notice...

- Do the rocks smell different when wet?
- Do the stones get slippery when wet?

## Adaptations and Variations

- Instead of water, use colored paints.
- Sort the rocks based on different characteristics (size, color, shape, texture—smooth, rough, etc.).

(add your own ideas)

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# Animal Books — Make Your Own



## Suggested Materials:

- Pictures of animals
- Glue sticks
- Scissors
- Construction paper
- Ribbon or yarn
- Hole punch

Allow the children to cut out (or tear around) photos of animals or other nature-related pictures.

Glue the photos onto construction paper (you may want to fold the construction paper so the book is small enough for little hands).

Punch holes in the paper and secure the pages together with ribbon or yarn.

## Adaptations and Variations

- Create a large, group collage on a BIG piece of paper.
- Laminate pictures and display on the walls where the children can see them.

(add your own ideas)

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# Leaf Rubbings & Leaves in Contact Paper



## Suggested Materials:

- Leaves of assorted colors and sizes
- Large crayons, assorted colors
- Colored pencils
- Tracing paper
- Contact or adhesive paper

Place a leaf on a flat surface (table or floor).

Put a piece of tracing paper over the leaf. Rub a crayon (or colored pencil) over the tracing paper above the leaf.

Notice the print (design) that you made.

Place a leaf or other nature objects onto a piece of contact/adhesive paper. Cover with another piece of contact/adhesive paper. Press tightly to secure the items.

## Adaptations and Variations

- For young children, tape the tracing paper to the table so that it stays in place as they rub over the leaf.
- Make placemats using leaves in contact paper.

(add your own ideas)

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# Shells and Twigs (Wood)



## Suggested Materials:

- Large, smooth sea shells
- Assorted pieces of wood found outside (such as twigs, branches)
- Note cards or heavy drawing paper
- Pens, pencils, markers

Allow the children to explore the shells and wood.

They may want to draw what they see or trace around the items.

What else do you notice...

- How does the wood feel?
- How do the shells feel?
- Are the shells/twigs bumpy or smooth?

## Activities, Adaptations, Variations

- Glue shells and wood together to form 3-D creations.
- Provide a tub of clean sand (or corn-meal) and put the shells into the tub. Large, smooth shells make good scoops.

(add your own ideas)

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# Puppets • Animals • Stories



## Suggested Materials:

- Animal hand puppets (glove puppets work best)
- Jumbo, plastic toy animals
- Board books about animals or nature
- Animal photos or photo cards

Read board books about animals or nature.

Using the hand puppets and toy animals, create new stories with the children as you play together.

Discover new things about favorite animals by reading information on the animal photo cards.

Which animals do the children like?

## Adaptations and Variations

- Add songs, fingerplays, poems, movement, and dance to the stories.
- Write down the words the children say as they share their ideas.

(add your own ideas)

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# Explore and More

## Suggested Materials:

- Nature items (leaves, twigs, grass, flowers, nuts, pinecones, empty bird nests, etc. — items large enough for toddlers to manipulate)
- Magnifying glasses
- Mirror trays
- Specimens of insects, animals, or other items



Allow the children to explore the items from nature by looking at them, feeling them, and using magnifying glasses, as desired.

Ask the children to describe what they see or tell you about the various ways the magnifying glasses change the appearance of each item.

## Adaptations and Variations

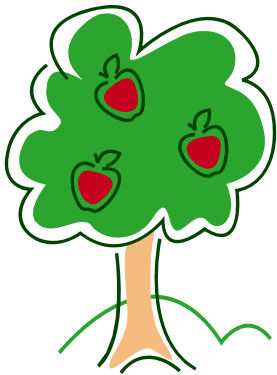
- Take the children on nature walks to collect additional items.
- Sort the items into various categories (such as by color, size, shape, texture, or other elements).

(add your own ideas)

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# Activity:



## Suggested Materials:

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## To Do:

## Adaptations and Variations

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# Activity:



## Suggested Materials:

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## To Do:

## Adaptations and Variations

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