

Early Childhood Outdoor Learning Ideas Guide

What can I do outside today?

Concrete

Blacktop

Grass

Playground

Beyond

What Can I Do Outside Today?

This companion document to the [Early Childhood Outdoor Learning Booklet](#) has been developed to help educators see the possibilities for nature-based learning in common spaces for young children. Each “common space” is defined and specific activity examples are listed under the different learning areas which correspond to the learning domains from the [Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress](#). Listed after each activity is the code of a subcomponent from the appropriate learning domain. Although many of the activities can and do contribute to development of more than one subcomponent, for this purpose we are offering example codes to help illustrate how the activity can support the identified subcomponent.

For example: Under the common space [Concrete](#), the activity listed under the topic: Approaches to Learning is: “Set up challenges for children: skip to the sign, hop to the tree, or jump to the cone” and the subcomponent identified is AL3. AL3 refers to the subcomponent “Attending” under the component “Attentiveness, Engagement, and Persistence” of the Approaches to Learning domain. The subcomponent and corresponding indicators address the standard: “Child focuses visual and auditory attention on relevant aspects of the environment.” This activity, when brought outside on the concrete, provides children the opportunity to focus their attention, engage for a period of time, and participate with others, while they listen to directions and visualize where and how they are moving their bodies. When children exhibit these “indicators” they are making progress in the standard identified in the subcomponent. This example illustrates how the outdoor activity is connected to the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress and how different domains can be supported using the common spaces available in the majority of early childhood programs.

Concrete

A concrete area is a hard surface outdoors. This includes patios, sidewalks, This is a space free from vehicles. Cones can be used to define the space if beyond the program’s use.

Approaches to Learning

- Set up challenges for children: skip to the sign, hop to the tree, or jump to the cone **AL3**

Music

Consider getting a movement activit activities can be c

Example excerpt from the document: **“What Can I Do Outside Today?”**

Example of corresponding domain, component, and subcomponent from the *Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress*.

Components AL3-6: Attentiveness, Engagement and Persistence

Subcomponent	0-1 year	1-2 years
AL3 Attending Child focuses visual and auditory attention on relevant aspects of the environment	AL3.1 Recognizes primary caregiver and familiar objects by touch, sight, sound, smell	AL3.2 Stays focused on activities for a sh period of time
...	...	...

Concrete

A concrete area is a hard surface outdoors. This includes patios, sidewalks, decks, plazas, or courtyards. This is a space free from vehicles. Cones can be used to define the space if it is utilized for other purposes beyond the program's use.

Approaches to Learning

- Set up challenges for children: skip to the sign, hop to the tree, or jump to the cone [AL3](#)

Language, Literacy and Communications

- Bring a basket of books and read [L4](#)
- Write names in chalk [L9](#)
- Act a story out as a class [L8](#)
- Journal with paper and pencils [L4](#)
- Place sand in individual trays for finger or stick tracing and have name cards or letter cards out to copy [L7](#)
- Bring manipulative toys and other typically-indoors games outside and play on a blanket or table [L2](#)
- Bring pretend play props outside (e.g., play kitchen items) [L1](#)
- Place plastic or wooden animals or figures on a blanket for pretend play [L3](#)

Tools for Fine Motor Skill Development

- Clipboards, paper, and pencils
- Manipulative toys
- Water and paintbrushes
- Scissors
- Tweezers
- Sand and trays
- Chalk
- Easels

Large Motor Skill Development Activities

- Hopscotch
- Obstacle course
- Animal movements
- Yoga poses
- Red Light, Green Light
- Scooters
- Parachute

Music

Consider getting a portable speaker for music and movement activities on the go. Many of these activities can be done anywhere.

- Parachute with songs [A1](#)
- Make homemade instruments out of toilet tubes or tissue boxes [A5](#)
- Bring class instruments outside on a blanket [A3](#)

Art

- Make maps of the playspace or other class spaces [A1](#)
- Bring an easel for painting with sticks [A3](#)
- Draw with pencils or chalk [A5](#)
- Place natural items on a tray and have children make self-portraits [A4](#)
- Glue leaves and other nature material on paper [A1](#)
- Cover a table or the fence with paper for group painting or drawing (good for a windy day) [A3](#)
- Paint on egg cartons [A1](#)
- Paint rocks [A5](#)

Science

- Use magnifying glasses to look at nature items [ST2](#)
- Bring measuring cups and sensory items in individual bins [ST1](#)
- Create a weather station to observe each day at school [ST3](#)
- Listen and watch for birds [ST1](#)

Math

- Bring out scales and weigh nature items [M7](#)
- Make patterns with natural items [M8](#)
- Have materials out on a blanket or table to create or sort patterns [M8](#)
- Match leaves on a blanket [M9](#)
- Draw shapes with chalk and use items like rocks or shells to fill the shape [M9](#)

Blacktop

A blacktop area is a hard surface such as a driveway or parking lot. For safety, it is important to use cones to mark off the areas that are dedicated to the classes. Generally, these spaces aren't conducive to sitting down on the ground due to car and road debris. Rather than setting items down on the ground or on blankets, use tables.

Approaches to Learning

- Yoga poses [AL3](#)
- Set up challenges for children: skip to the sign, hop to the tree, or jump to the cone [AL3](#)

Music

- Parachute with songs [A1](#)
- Make homemade instruments out of toilet tubes or tissue boxes [A5](#)

Language, Literacy and Communications

- Write names in chalk [L6, L7, L9](#)
- Journal with paper and pencils [L4, L7](#)
- Place sand in individual trays for finger or stick tracing and have name cards or letter cards out to copy [L6, L7](#)
- Bring manipulative toys and other typically-indoors games outside and play on a blanket or table
- Bring pretend play props outside (e.g., play kitchen items) [L1, L2](#)
- Place plastic or wooden animals or figures on a blanket for pretend play [L2, L3](#)

Art

- Make maps of the playspace or other class spaces [A1](#)
- Bring an easel outside for painting [A3](#)
- Draw with pencils or chalk [A5](#)
- Place natural items on a tray and have children make self-portraits
- Do art activities on a table outside
- Glue leaves and other nature material on paper [A1](#)
- Cover a table or the fence with paper for group painting or drawing (good for a windy day) [A3](#)
- Paint on egg cartons [A1](#)

Tools for Fine Motor Skill Development [P5-6](#)

- Clipboards, paper, and pencils
- Sand and trays
- Easels

Science

- Use magnifying glasses to look at nature items [ST1, ST2](#)
- Bring measuring cups and sensory items in individual bins [ST1, ST2, ST3](#)

Large Motor Skill Development Activities [P1-4](#)

- Bikes or other wheeled toys with areas marked off with cones
- Hopscotch
- Yoga poses
- Scooters
- Parachute

Math

- Have materials out on a table to create or sort patterns [M8](#)
- Match leaves on a table [M2, M3, M4, M6, M9](#)
- Draw shapes with chalk and use items like rocks or shells to fill the shape [M7, M9](#)

Grass

A grass area is a space that is covered in grass or other natural materials like leaves, sand, wood chips or dirt. This space is usually within your own school's play space or close to it.

Approaches to Learning

- Red light - Green Light traditional or switch colors [AL3](#), [AL12](#)
- Tell a story together; teacher prompts with the beginning, students then add details [AL8](#), [AL9](#), [AL12](#), [AL13](#)
- Yoga poses [AL3](#)
- Set up challenges for children: skip to the sign, hop to the tree, or jump to the cone [AL3](#)

Tools for Fine Motor Skill Development [P5-6](#)

- Clipboards, paper, and pencils
- Manipulative toys
- Scissors
- Tweezers
- Sand and trays
- Rulers
- Chalk
- Easels

Large Motor Skill Development Activities [P1-4](#)

- Animal movements
- Red Light, Green light
- Yoga poses
- Ball play
- Parachute
- Tunnels
- Duck Duck Gray Duck
- Ring-Around-the-Rosie

Music

- Parachute with songs [A1](#)
- Make homemade instruments out of toilet tubes or tissue boxes [A5](#)
- Bring class instruments outside on a blanket [A3](#)

Language, Literacy and Communications

- Bring a basket of books outside on a blanket [L4](#), [L7](#)
- Create a story walk [L4](#), [L7](#), [L8](#)
- Write white boards on a blanket [L6](#), [L7](#), [L9](#)
- Bring out handwriting practice supplies: writing board, wooden pieces, and chalkboards
- Act a story out as a class [L1](#), [L2](#), [L3](#), [L4](#), [L8](#)
- Place sand in individual trays for finger or stick tracing and have name cards or letter cards out to copy [L6](#), [L7](#)
- Journal with paper and pencils [L4](#), [L7](#)
- Bring manipulative toys and other typically-indoors games outside and play on a blanket or table
- Bring pretend play props outside (e.g., play kitchen items) [L1](#), [L2](#)
- Place plastic or wooden animals or figures on a blanket for pretend play [L2](#), [L3](#)

Art

- Lie in the grass and ask children how they think the clouds are made and then have the kids draw the clouds [A1](#)
- Make maps of the playspace or other class spaces [A1](#)
- Place nature items on a tray and have children make self-portraits [A5](#)
- Bring an easel outside for painting [A3](#)
- Do art activities on a table outside
- Glue leaves and other nature material on paper [A1](#)
- Cover a table or the fence with paper for group painting or drawing (good for a windy day) [A3](#)
- Paint on egg cartons [A1](#)
- Make leaf mobiles with a plastic sewing needle with yarn

Grass

A grass area is a space that is covered in grass or other natural materials like leaves, sand, wood chips or dirt. This space is usually within your own school's play space or close to it.

Science

- Measure the diameter of a tree using yarn, compare with other trees in the area
- Bring magnifying glasses or other science tools outside [ST1](#), [ST2](#)
- Measure the length of different sticks and put them in order from biggest to smallest
- Bring measuring cups and sensory items in individual bins [ST1](#), [ST2](#), [ST3](#)
- Plant bulbs that will grow in spring [ST3](#)
- Create a weather station to observe each day at school [ST3](#), [ST5](#)
- Lie on a blanket to listen to the sounds of nature [ST1](#), [ST5](#)

Math

- Bring out scales and weigh natural items [M7](#)
- Make patterns with natural items [M8](#)
- Look for patterns in nature [M8](#)
- Have materials out on a blanket or table to create or sort patterns [M2](#), [M3](#), [M4](#), [M6](#), [M9](#)
- Match leaves on a blanket [M2](#), [M3](#), [M4](#), [M6](#), [M9](#)
- Draw shapes with chalk and use items like rocks or shells to fill the shape [M7](#), [M9](#)
- Count how many clouds or birds are in the sky, ants on the ground, etc. [M2](#), [M3](#), [M4](#), [M6](#), [M9](#)

Playground

A playground area is a space that has a typical play structure. These areas can be utilized for play and exploration beyond just the play structure.

Approaches to Learning

- Yoga poses [AL3](#)
- Set up challenges for children: skip to the sign, hop to the tree, or jump to the cone [AL3](#)

Language, Literacy and Communications

- Bring a basket of books and read [L4, L7](#)
- Journal with paper and pencils [L4, L7](#)
- Place sand in individual trays for finger or stick tracing and have name cards or letter cards out to copy [L6, L7](#)
- Bring manipulative toys and other typically-indoors games outside and play on a blanket or table
- Bring pretend play props outside (e.g., play kitchen items) [L1, L2](#)
- Place plastic or wooden animals or figures on a blanket for pretend play [L2, L3](#)

Tools for Fine Motor Skill Development [P5-6](#)

- Clipboards, paper, and pencils
- Manipulative toys
- Water and paintbrushes
- Scissors
- Tweezers
- Sand and trays
- Chalk
- Easels

Large Motor Skill Development Activities [P1-4](#)

- Hide and Seek
- Obstacle course
- Scavenger hunt
- Yoga poses
- Parachute

Music

- Parachute with songs [A1](#)
- Make homemade instruments out of toilet tubes or tissue boxes [A5](#)
- Create a music wall with old pots and pans and wooden spoons [A3](#)

Art

- Make maps of the playspace or other class spaces [A1](#)
- Bring an easel for painting [A3](#)
- Draw with pencils [A5](#)
- Bring a table out for art activities to be done outside
- Place nature items on a tray and have children make self-portraits [A4](#)
- Glue leaves and other nature material on paper [A1](#)
- Cover a table or the fence with paper for group painting or drawing (good for a windy day) [A3](#)
- Paint on egg cartons or rocks [A1](#)

Science

- Use magnifying glasses to look at nature items [ST1, ST2](#)
- Bring measuring cups and sensory items in individual bins [ST1, ST2, ST3](#)
- Plant bulbs that will grow in spring [ST3](#)
- Create a weather station to observe each day at school [ST3, ST5](#)

Math

- Bring out scales and weigh natural items [M8](#)
- Make patterns with nature items [M8](#)
- Look for patterns on play equipment [M8](#)
- Have materials out on a blanket or table to create or sort patterns [M8](#)
- Match leaves on a blanket [M2, M3, M4, M6, M9](#)
- Draw shapes with chalk and use items like rocks or shells to fill the shape [M7, M9](#)
- Count how many clouds or birds are in the sky, ants on the ground, etc. [M2, M3, M4, M6, M9](#)

Beyond

Beyond is any space that is outside of your immediate play area. This can include a school forest, going for walks in the neighborhood, visiting a local park, or visiting a nearby community garden. Wagons are useful to have for supplies for when you set up your classroom in a space that is beyond the playspace that is right at your school.

Approaches to Learning

- Yoga poses [AL3](#)
- Set up challenges for children: skip to the sign, hop to the tree, or jump to the cone [AL3](#)
- Waiting places as you move from space to space [AL10](#)
- Red Light, Green Light (traditional or switch colors) [AL3](#), [AL12](#)

Language, Literacy and Communications

- Bring a basket of books and read [L4](#), [L7](#)
- Journal with paper and pencils [L4](#), [L7](#)
- Bring manipulative toys and other typically-indoors games outside and play on a blanket or table
- Bring pretend play props outside (e.g., play kitchen items) [L1](#), [L2](#)
- Place plastic or wooden animals or figures on a blanket for pretend play [L2](#), [L3](#)

Tools for Fine Motor Skill Development [P5-6](#)

- Clipboards, paper, and pencils
- Manipulative toys
- Scissors
- Tweezers
- Easels
- Sticks

Large Motor Skill Development Activities [P1-4](#)

Go for a walk:

- Shape walk
- Scavenger hunt
- Bug walk
- Color walk

Music

- Parachute with songs [A1](#)
- Bring a portable speaker to sing and dance to songs you would typically listen to in the indoor classroom
- Use leaves and sticks as “bean bags” and “rhythm sticks” [A4](#)

Art

- Make maps of the outdoor space being explored [A1](#)
- Draw with pencils [A5](#)
- Place nature items on a tray and have children make self-portraits [A4](#)

Science

- Measure the diameter of a tree using yarn, compare with other trees in the area
- Measure the length of different sticks and put them in order from biggest to smallest [M2](#), [M3](#), [M4](#), [M6](#), [M7](#)
- Go for a walk to listen and observe what is heard and seen [ST1](#), [ST2](#)

Math

Go on a walk to:

- Look for patterns in nature [M8](#)
- Count how many windows, doors, trees, flowers or buildings you pass [M2](#), [M3](#), [M4](#), [M6](#), [M9](#)
- Look for shapes in nature [M9](#)

Material Ideas

Art

- Portable/outdoor easel
- Homemade all natural water color paints
- Yarn and plastic sewing needles
- Trays
- Clay
- Glue
- Bird feeder kits

Music

- Drums
- Bean bags
- Pots & pans
- Rain sticks
- Boomwhackers
- Tambourines

Math

- Scales
- Rulers
- Discovery tables
- Abacuses
- Thermometers

Science

- Magnifying glasses
- Journals
- Tweezers
- Pipettes
- Water pumps
- Measuring cups
- Gardening tools (shovels, rakes, spades, etc.)
- Binoculars
- Watering cans
- Pond nets
- Microscopes
- Field guides (insects, trees, animals, etc.)

Dramatic Play

- Kitchen item set (plates, silverware, cups, etc.)
- Cleaning toys (vacuums, brushes, spray bottles, etc.)
- Costumes
- Plastic or wooden animal figures
- Dolls and doll houses
- Blankets

Language and Literacy

- Books
- Chalk
- Walkie Talkies

Fine Motor Skills

- Individual sand trays
- Scissors
- Building blocks
- Bubbles
- Sports equipment (lawn bowling, basketball hoops, golf clubs, etc.)

Gross Motor Skills

- Cones
- Scooters
- Mini trampolines
- Balls (beach balls, soccer balls, bouncy balls, etc.)
- Pop-up tunnels
- Play vehicles (wagons, tricycles, toy cars, etc.)
- Buckets