



Here comes THE SUN

Put on a hat, pick up a parasol and make the most of the summer, says national charity Learning through Landscapes...



Where better to be than outside during summer? Try the following suggestions to maximise your setting's outdoor potential and give your children the best experience of the new season.

But before you go out...

Make sure you're prepared for the sun. Encourage parents to apply sun cream before the children arrive; staff can then top up the protection throughout the day. Make sure you're aware of any allergies. If parents do bring in sun cream remind them that it should be a high factor, (preferably 50) and point out that certain clothing does not always offer reliable protection. Ask parents to provide trainers and highlight the fact that open toe sandals are not suitable for outdoor play. Sleeveless dresses and vest tops are also not suitable. Make sure there's plenty of shade available and provide umbrellas, parasols or pop-up sun shades so the children can take a break from the heat.

Tip: 'Legionnaire-style' hats offer the best protection for outdoor play in the sun, offering all over defence for the head and neck. Many come with an Ultraviolet Protection Factor (UPF) of 50+.

Harvesting and growing

With a little imagination, food can be grown anywhere in your outdoor space. There's a huge range of vegetables and fruit that can be grown from pots or containers. If you're short on room, you could also consider spaces such as window ledges or create outdoor shelves for growing dwarf tomato plants, herbs or peppers. Try growing a vertical garden using hanging baskets and trellises. Tomatoes and strawberries can be grown in the former and will add colour to your space, but make sure they're watered regularly. Cucumbers, pumpkin, squash and all vine types of crops grow well with a strong trellis.

Try growing a summer flower garden for children to see, feel and smell. Use flowers that are safe if eaten such as bergamot, angelica, marigolds, carnations, camomile and anise hyssop. This way, if the children decide to taste the flowers, they'll be perfectly safe (although it would be advisable to explain that not all flowers are safe to eat!). Remember not to use chemicals when growing a flower garden.

Nature trail

Try exploring the various colours, shapes and textures of natural materials. Ask the children to find something flat, round, rough, smooth, wet or dry. See how many different colours they can see in front of them without moving. Ask the children to collect items of a specific colour, adding leaves, grasses, berries, flowers, petals, pine cones, sticks or feathers to their respective colour piles. Discuss where they may have come from. You could try asking the children to create their own outdoor art using the natural materials they find. Collect leaves, twigs, grasses and other items to make up a large picture on the ground.

Weather activities

On hotter days see how quickly ice melts when you put it in different areas of your setting. Freeze water coloured with food colouring to make coloured ice cubes, and then let the children use them to make marks on paper. Find ways of staying cool by making a variety of materials available for creating shady dens and enjoy water play with resources such as hose pipes and water sprinklers. Provide a selection of decorator's brushes, rollers and buckets for painting with

Tip: If your area is paved, try lifting some slabs – making a patchwork effect – for manageable mini-plots which children can reach easily when planting and picking.

Tip: If you're considering purchasing items to help you explore nature, bug boxes and magnifiers add great excitement to a bug hunt. Select those that are easy for little hands to hold and which allow lots of light onto the subject. Two-way viewers are especially good as they collect plenty of light and enable each child to look at the creature's underside as well as its back.





Tip: Sunglasses and pieces of cellophane allow children to look at the world in different shades and colours. Use CDs, prisms and foil trays to explore reflection.

plastics will not absorb the heat as much as concrete and metals. For a more temporary, cost-effective solution, consider tents (large family-sized ones can be purchased for a good price), fabric gazebos which can be easily stored, or fabric/plastic netting, available from garden centres and haberdashers. These could be stretched over a frame between vertical posts or between walls and then camouflaged with twigs, grass, flowers, or weaved materials.

water and exploring evaporation. Record temperatures at various times of the day and different locations within the playground – discuss how sun and shade affects this. Look at shadows and how they change as we move, and try drawing around them.

Maintaining your space

Review the shade and shelter that your outdoor space provides. If you're planning on adding a permanent fixture use environmentally-friendly materials and consider cost, purpose and how frequently the feature will be used before investing. Materials such as wood, rope, rush matting and some



Dates for your diary

MARK THE SOLSTICE AND TAKE YOUR MUSIC PLAY OUTSIDE...

JUNE 5TH – ENVIRONMENT DAY

Environment Day is a chance for everyone to reflect and act on issues affecting the world's climate. Allow the children to create outdoor art using recycled and natural materials, then create an outdoor gallery for all to see. Or, create large animals and trees in your setting and make your own rainforest.

JUNE 21ST – SUMMER SOLSTICE

Summer's here, so why not celebrate the longest day of the year? Try creating your own midsummer festival. You may wish to recreate Stonehenge out of large boxes, after discussing the landmark and the mystery of its making.

JULY-AUGUST – Create a music festival!

Try celebrating the summer with your setting's own Glastonbury-style music festival. Practise songs and experiment with different instruments before inviting parents to view the concert. Invite buskers or local musicians to come along and join in with the festival.

findoutmore

Learning through Landscapes provides an early years outdoors membership package offering advice and support to help unlock the potential of your outdoor environment. Membership provides unlimited access to individual advice and support by phone or email, bi-monthly mailings full of inspiration, online access to a comprehensive library of resources and discounts on training, conferences and publications. Visit ftl.org.uk