

How do you design your indoor & outdoor space to engage children in quality natural environments?

A natural environment at your OOSH service is an environment which includes natural elements.

Natural environments may include:

- Gardens where children can grow their own plants
- Washed sand in trays for sensory, symbolic and physical play e.g. Setting up a dinosaur scene or writing messages in the sand like Aboriginal people did
- Digging patches where children can use garden equipment
- A range of planting to encourage a variety of modes of play such as playing with gum nuts, small branches, flowers, stones and bark
- Small pits of pebbles, gravel, coarse and smooth river rocks for imaginative play
- Plants for picking and eating
- Plants that encourage birds, butterflies and other insects
- Trees that provide shade
- Worm farms and compost areas for environmental education
- Water play areas for sensory play.

Why do we need to bring natural items into our OOSH Centres?

Natural materials challenge and inspire children's thinking, with no set outcomes.

INDOOR

- Logs and branches from trees, e.g. sawn off logs for seats
- Small logs used as blocks – non-traditional blocks encourage pretend play
- Indoor plants can be grown in pots and used with toy animals
- Wooden toys provide sensory and tactile experiences not provided by plastic toys.
- Baskets can be used to store material and equipment to play with.
- Small sand boxes inside can be filled with small pebbles, sawdust or sand for play.
- A bowl of corks floating in water so children can learn about flotation.
- Add rocks and sticks to the building area.
- Make a nature grid where children can display natural items they have collected. They can touch and examine them e.g. bird's nest, large leaves, pine cones



Natural environments both indoors and outdoors provide:

- Interest and stimulation
- Additional variety
- Places to explore
- Open ended interactions
- Spontaneity
- Risk taking
- Exploration
- Discovery
- An appreciation of the natural environment, developing environmental awareness and a platform for ongoing environmental education.



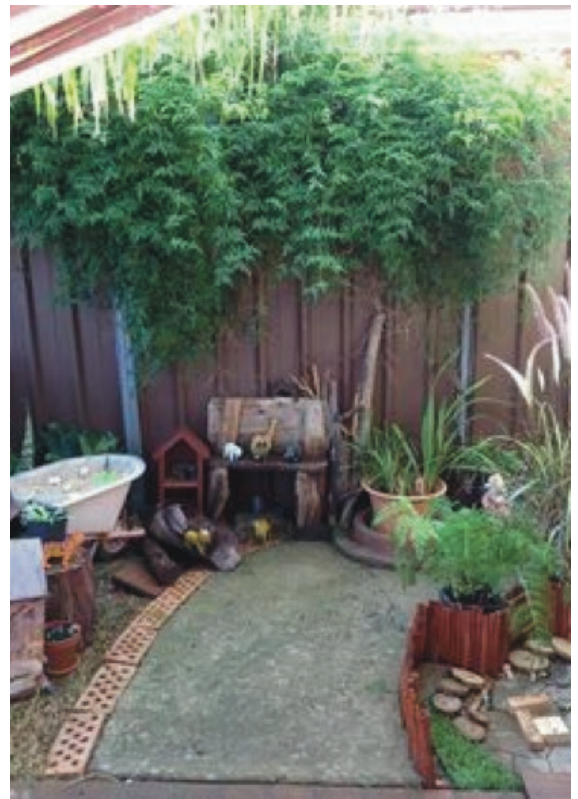
Replace plastic with natural containers

- Baskets
- Wooden Crayon Holders (children can help to make them)



OUTDOOR

- Natural materials can divide areas – plants in large pots, large logs and sawn logs for seats.
- Wooden recycled pallets to create “Pallet Lounges” for the children to relax in
- Tyres to grow plants in, filled with sensory materials, dividing areas and storing toys and materials.
- Twigs and branches can be placed in a digging patch for interest and variety. Large stones can surround digging patches for sitting on or using in play.
- Get children to create creek beds using stones and plants and add water for sensory play.
- Wooden outdoor furniture can add variety to play spaces.
- Bird baths, cubbies and materials that allow children to construct small spaces in which to play.



What evidence is there that children are aware of their natural environment?

- Showing a growing concern and appreciation for natural environments
- Observing, noticing and responding to changes in the environment
- Developing an awareness of the impact of human activity on environments and the interdependence of living things.

What is the role of the Educator?

- Provide access to natural materials
- Find ways that children can care and learn from the land
- Model respect, care and appreciation for the natural environment
- Sharing information and providing access to resources about the environment and the impact of human activities on environments
- Embedding sustainability in daily routines and practices
- Looking for examples of interdependence in the environment and discussing the ways the life and health of living things are interconnected.

Remember – we don't always need to set up natural activities... they are sometimes all around us. We just need to explore them!

