

The Nature Discovery Table



Enriching Childhood Through Play®

Activity Starters Guide

Bring learning outdoors and add value to children's play experiences with GameTime's Nature Discovery Table! This interactive table brings a fun, hands-on experience to your playground environment that can provide both facilitated and free play opportunities, motivate learning, and promote play and social interaction for people of all ages and abilities. These simple activity starters have been created to reinforce science concepts, promote exploration, and increase children's engagement with nature in a multisensory environment- your playground! We hope you will find them as useful springboards to help children develop vocabulary, encourage conversations, provide opportunities for creative expression, and discover the wonders of the natural world. We believe in purposefully designing nature into children's lives, and hope that these activity starters will offer creative ways for you to put nature into play!



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Activity Starters:



Fun with Rubbings:

Creating rubbings is always a fun and simple art project for kids! First, place a sheet of paper over the desired raised graphic. Using a soft colored pencil or crayon, gently rub over the paper until the outline of graphic shows through. Add additional rubbings or drawings using different colors to create a colorful piece of work! Encourage children to collect leaves or other nature objects found in the play environment to add to their project for even more exploration!

Nature Detectives: A Scavenger Hunt Success

Every play environment has its own set of characteristics and places to explore! After exploring and discussing the variety of organisms on the Nature Discovery Table challenge children to locate similar items in the surrounding area. Consider giving each child a magnifying glass, camera, and/or a collection bag to use during their discovery. You can also hide items such as small play animals, pictures, or plastic bugs throughout the play environment prior to the activity for children to find. Ask children to bring back the items to the table to match and see how many items were found and to further explore. Discuss other items they found or saw; you will be surprised at all the interesting signs of life they can find right on the playground!

Leaf Match Up

Challenge children to explore the play environment to collect a variety of leaves. Ask the children to match the leaves they found to the various leaves on the Nature Discovery Table. Discuss similarities and differences or help them identify the various types of leaves that were collected. To extend the activity, they can tape or glue their leaf to a piece of paper and create a rubbing of the matching leaf using the Nature Discovery Table or the leaf they collected.

How Many?

Practice simple counting and identification skills by asking children to count the objects on the Nature Discovery Table. Giving them categories or characteristics of the nature items can offer additional challenges and facilitate further discussion. For example, count the number of leaves. How many bugs do you see? How many amphibians can you find? How many animals do you see that live in the water? How many living organisms can you locate?

Nature Charades

Have children choose an item on the Nature Discovery Table. Ask each child to act out various characteristics or movements of their chosen item as others guess what they are pretending to be. After the answer is revealed, ask them to share what they know about the item. Encourage discussion about the classification, similarities, and differences, and even habitats for deeper understanding and connections.

Feeling Nature

Ask children to close their eyes and use their hands and fingers to touch the raised objects on the Nature Discovery Table. Challenge them to describe what they are feeling and guess what each object is. It is fun to see how many objects they get correct from this sensory experience! To further extend this activity, children can collect various nature items from the play environment, put them in a bag or container, and let a friend try to feel each object and guess what it is without looking.

Habitat Homes

Ask the children to create a rubbing of their favorite animal on the Nature Discovery Table. Discuss that all animals have a place or area where they live called a habitat and what they need in their homes to survive (Ex. food, water, cover, places to raise young, etc.) Ask the children to create a home for their animal by adding drawings or pasting natural elements collected in the play environment (Ex. leaves, grasses, berries, dirt, etc.) to their rubbing on their paper to design their own wildlife habitat.

The Birth of a Butterfly: Exploring the Life Cycle of a Butterfly

Ask the children to share what they know about butterflies. Ask the children if they know what the butterfly was before it became a butterfly. Discuss the life cycle of a butterfly and stages of metamorphosis (Ex. egg, larva, chrysalis, butterfly). Using the raised motif on the Nature Discovery Table of the caterpillar, chrysalises, and butterfly, ask children to create rubbings of the life cycle of a butterfly in the correct order. To extend the activity, you can ask the students to label the stages or use other art materials to create patterns on the butterfly's wings.

Feeling Froggy: Exploring the Life Cycle of a Frog

Ask the children to share what they know about frogs. Ask the children if they know what the frog was before it became an adult. Discuss the life cycle of a frog and the stages of metamorphosis (Ex. egg, tadpole, metamorph, frog). Using the raised motif on the Nature Discovery Table of the various phases of the tadpole to frog, ask the children to create rubbings of the life cycle of a frog in the correct order. To extend the activity, you can ask the students to label the stages or use other art materials to paint or color their rubbings.

