



# LITTLE GREEN EXPLORERS



BOMBECK FAMILY LEARNING CENTER



Now Accepting Nature Donations! With spring in full bloom and the snow melted away, it's the perfect time to collect interesting natural treasures for the nature museum. Keep an eye out for unique rocks, pinecones, seed pods, or other signs of the season to share!



## SPRING MEANS MUD + MUD MEANS PLAY!



As the ground thaws and spring rains soak the earth, mud becomes one of the most exciting and beneficial natural play materials for young children. Mud play is more than just a messy activity—it's a powerful tool for learning, development, and overall well-being. Engaging in mud play allows children to explore textures, temperatures, and consistencies, providing rich sensory input that helps build neural connections in the brain. The simple act of squishing mud between fingers, stomping in puddles, or shaping mud pies strengthens fine and gross motor skills, improving coordination and dexterity essential for writing, cutting, and other everyday tasks.

Beyond the physical benefits, mud play sparks creativity and imaginative thinking. A patch of wet earth can become anything in a child's mind—a bakery filled with mud pies, a construction site for digging and sculpting, or a magical potion-making station. Open-ended play like this encourages problem-solving and scientific thinking as children experiment with how mud changes when mixed with water, pressed into shapes, or dried by the sun. It also lays the foundation for early STEM learning, as children naturally engage in concepts like cause and effect, states of matter, and engineering while building and creating with mud.

Socially and emotionally, mud play fosters cooperation, teamwork, and resilience. Whether children are working together to build a mud fort or sharing tools to mix and pour, they practice communication, negotiation, and collaboration. The sensory experience of playing in mud can also have a calming effect, reducing stress and anxiety while increasing focus and engagement. In fact, research suggests that exposure to beneficial microbes in soil can help strengthen the immune system, enhance mood, and even support mental health.

Most importantly, mud play nurtures a child's connection to nature. In a world where screen time often dominates, getting hands dirty in real-world, open-ended play allows children to develop a deep appreciation for the earth and its natural cycles. So, embrace the mess! Mud play is not just fun—it's an essential, joyful part of childhood that supports learning, health, and a lifelong love of nature.



## SUSTAINABLE ACTIVITIES

### **MUD KITCHEN PLAY:**

Create an outdoor mud kitchen using old pots, wooden spoons, and natural materials like leaves, flowers, and sticks. This activity encourages sensory exploration, imaginative play, and early STEM learning as children experiment with textures and mixtures.

### **RAINWATER COLLECTION:**

Set out small buckets or repurposed containers to catch rainwater, then use it for watering plants or sensory water play. This introduces the concept of water conservation in an interactive way.

### **PUDDLE PLAY & MUD INVESTIGATIONS:**

After a spring rain, let children jump in puddles, test what sinks or floats in water, and explore the different consistencies of wet and dry mud. This hands-on activity strengthens scientific thinking and sensory exploration.

### **WORM DISCOVERY & SOIL DIGGING:**

Dig in the dirt to observe worms and their role in keeping soil healthy. Create a worm habitat using a clear container to watch how they tunnel and mix soil.



### **BUTTERFLY & BEE OBSERVATION:**

Set up a butterfly puddling station using a shallow dish filled with wet sand and stones. This helps pollinators stay hydrated while allowing children to observe them up close.

### **NATURAL PAINTS & DYES:**

Create homemade paints using mud, crushed berries, flower petals, or spices like turmeric and paprika. Let children explore different colors and textures while making art.

### **ECO-FRIENDLY STORYTIME:**

Read books about nature, sustainability, and environmental stewardship. Pair the stories with related activities, like planting a seed after reading a book about gardens or making a nature craft after a story about wildlife.

## SUSTAINABLE SWAP



**TIP:** Instead of buying store-bought playdough, create your own using ingredients like flour, salt, and vegetable dyes from natural sources (such as beetroot or spinach). This is not only healthier but also minimizes plastic packaging waste. Plus, plant-based play dough also allows children to explore the process of making something from scratch, fostering creativity and a deeper connection to the materials they use.

**CHILDREN WHO LOVE NATURE WILL  
ULTIMATELY GROW UP TO DEFEND IT**