

COACH'S CORNER

Coach's Corner is a DIEEC blog dedicated to providing fresh ideas for all early childhood education professionals.



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Taking Art Outside

School is out and summer is here! Many programs are on a “summer camp” schedule, providing an opportunity to spend more time outdoors and introduce new activities.

Often, we view outdoor time as an opportunity for free play, using specific outdoor toys (balls, ride-on toys, etc.) and playground equipment, or as a “break” from typical learning activities. While any outdoor play has benefits, we can add some variety to our children’s outdoor experiences by adding some planned but optional art activities.

Bringing art outside

For programs looking to spend more time in the fresh air, consider including an outdoor art activity in your free play time. There are many benefits to bringing art outdoors.

- Freedom to be messy!
- Children can spread out and have more space to create.
- Educators can work with children individually while the rest of the group is engaged in free play (**Reminder: the whole group must be supervised and in sight of the educator.**)
- A different setting for art activities may engage children who are not typically excited about art.



Image by Christian Ferrell/DIEEC

Below are some fun and inexpensive art activities that work best outdoors, with a few children at a time. These activities are designed to be a choice during free play rather than a required, whole-group activity.

Bubble art- Mix non-toxic bubble solution with some drops of food coloring, non-toxic paint, or liquid watercolors. Children can dip the bubble wand in the dyed solution and blow bubbles onto a piece of paper. (This activity may be best for children over 3 who can safely blow bubbles without ingesting them!)



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Nature painting- Encourage the children to collect leaves, sticks, flowers, etc. Use these items in place of paintbrushes. Children can dip the leaves or flowers in the paint and make prints on paper.



Image by Christian Ferrell/DIEEC

Chalk painting- This is a great one for getting older school-age children involved! Take sidewalk chalk and grind it into powder using a cheese grater. (Educators or older school-age children should handle the cheese grater.) Add water to the chalk powder and mix it up. Children can use the paint on concrete or blacktop surfaces. The best part is that it washes away with the rain!



Tip: For many of these activities, you can tape the paper to a fence for a no-cost easel!



Image by Meghan Pallante/DIEEC

Water squirter painting- Bring an easel outdoors or tape large pieces of butcher paper to a fence. Fill water squirters with watered-down paint, stand back, and spray them on the paper!



Image by Christian Ferrell/DIEEC

3D nature art- Encourage children to collect sticks, rocks, leaves, pinecones, etc. Encourage the children to use their imagination to create fairy/gnome houses, castles, bridges, and other structures.

Shadow art- Place items in the sun and place paper wherever their shadow lands. The children can then trace the shadow. For a fun twist, use larger pieces of butcher paper and let the children trace each other's shadows.

Water painting- This is a super-easy activity that can even be done with infants and toddlers- just be sure to closely supervise them around water! Fill a few bowls with water and grab some paint brushes. Let the children paint with water on concrete surfaces, large rocks, fences, or even play structures.

There is so much creativity to be found outdoors! **We would love to see how you are taking art outdoors in your program this summer!** Send us pictures at ecinstitute@udel.edu or tag us on [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#). Happy creating!



Image by Christian Ferrell/DIEEC

Resources:

[Preschoolers as Eco-Artists- NAEYC](#)

[The Best Art Studio of All: The Great Outdoors- Community Playthings](#)

Your toolkit for inexpensive outdoor art activities:

Paper and/or butcher paper

Crayons

Tape

Water squirters

Non-toxic paint

Sidewalk chalk

Grater

Bubble solution and bubble wand

Paint brushes

Water

Bowls

Nature objects- leaves, flowers, sticks...

With these items, you can do any of the activities in this article!