

EarthPLAY for Earth Day 2017

Connect to your nature!



What you'll find in this toolkit

- WHAT IS EARTHPLAY AND WHY IT MATTERS
- HOW TO EARTHPLAY FOR EARTH DAY:
 - Host an afternoon of Adventure Play in your local park
- LIST OF LOOSE PARTS, AND HOW TO COLLECT THEM
- PLAYING OUTSIDE IN ALL WEATHER
- TIPS FOR ENGAGING YOUR COMMUNITY

What is EarthPLAY?

EarthPLAY is Earth Day Canada's new program to bring outdoor, unstructured play back into children's lives across Canada – in schools, parks, streets and other public spaces – with the aim of supporting their connection to nature, as well as their health, wellbeing, ingenuity, resilience and sense of community.

We believe that children need to experience the outdoor world through self-directed play in order to care about nature, learn about it, and develop the agency they will need to take action as environmental leaders down the road.

Our EarthPLAY initiative for parks is called ParkPLAY and its aim is to support the introduction of adventure playgrounds into cities across Canada; as a first step, our team hosts regular POP-UP Adventure Playgrounds across the Greater Toronto Area, which focus on play with natural and upcycled "loose parts". This is an effective and affordable method of bringing complex and enriched play opportunities to local parks and other shared green spaces.

Our EarthPLAY initiative for streets is called StreetPLAY; at the moment, we are concentrating on the launch of the Toronto StreetPLAY Pilot Project (TSPP), which will test the feasibility of reoccurring street closures for the purpose of outdoor play in two local neighbourhoods. The results of this pilot, along with a study conducted by Ryerson University, will inform a new City permit process to make StreetPLAY more accessible.

Our EarthPLAY initiative for schools is called SchoolPLAY and is centered on our Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) pilot program with six Toronto District School Board elementary schools. You can read more about OPAL and the Earth Day campaign for schools on our website.

Why it matters

1. **PLAY fosters a meaningful connection to the environment.** The more time children and youth spend playing outdoors in nature, even if that nature is limited to open sky and a patch of grass, the more likely they are to grow into adults who are inspired by it, motivated to protect it and able to take action.
2. **PLAY promotes health and wellbeing.** The 2015 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth calls for "an increased investment in natural play spaces in all neighbourhoods" and explicitly asks federal and provincial governments to find ways to improve children's access to risky active play in nature and the outdoors.
3. **PLAY is a child's right.** The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Canada in 1991, affirms children's right to self-directed play and unstructured leisure time. It also highlights data showing our children are suffering from a deficit of outdoor activity and play.

How to EarthPLAY for Earth Day

- **Host an afternoon of Adventure Play in your local park!**

What is Adventure Play?

Adventure Play is an opportunity for kids to connect to their inner and outer nature through self-directed outdoor play. By providing a variety of materials, natural and manmade, commonly referred to as “loose parts”, children transform their environment into vibrant play spaces where all sorts of neat and unexpected things can be created, constructed and organized. Loose parts provide children enriched opportunities for many types of imaginative play and naturally promote higher levels of activity, creativity and collaboration.



Loose parts: What are they?

Loose parts are a wonderful addition to your child’s play. They should be low-value items, cheap or donated, that can be ripped, bent or modified in the process of creating something new. Clean-up is part of the play: The children should be asked to pick up 4 to 6 pieces each, and everyone must do their part to tidy the area!

How to host an afternoon of Adventure Play in your park

1. Set up a Play Team for your event

Recruit a team of 4-6 volunteers to help coordinate your Adventure Play event. Choose the right location*, date and time for your event, and assign tasks such as coordinating with your local park staff, collecting loose parts, and reaching out to your neighbourhood community.

*Most city parks do not require a permit for community gatherings of less than 25 people, however we recommend contacting your local park/recreation staff to let them know about your event.

2. **Announce the Day!**

Let your community know what you are planning. Use our posters, videos and other materials from our website to explain and promote your event.

3. **Start a loose parts collection.**

As long as there is enough stuff, there shouldn't be any conflict on the playground. We suggest about 4 loose parts per child as a guarantee that you will have enough. Loose parts should be easy to source, free, or reusable materials that can ideally be recycled after the event. One of the first things most children will do, given the chance to play freely, is build a fort. Next they will furnish it and then, they will want their grub. Just like the rest of us, right? So organize your loose parts collecting into broad categories such as Fort-Building Stuff, Odds 'n' Ends (for interior furnishings), and Kitchen Equipment. Further ideas, if you do follow these categories, are here below:

Fort-building:

Items such as cardboard boxes, cardboard tubes, spools, buckets, tarp or sheer fabric all make for great adventure play, and especially fort building. Reach out to local furniture stores, bicycle shops, garden centres, grocery and hardware stores for packaging materials and other clean scrap. String, rope, various kinds of clips and clothes pegs and the ever-faithful duct tape will help to join things up. Go for volume if you can – loose parts provide compound flexibility so, the more you provide of one thing, the more ideas the children will get.

Home-making and potions:

Along with your big construction items, which will take some organizing to collect, think about setting up a place in your school where parents and staff can leave other items for the play day. Children love to dig into the earth, look for its secrets, add water and mix potions. Hopefully your local park has a sand pit, a pond or just a lot of snow! See if you can get parents to loan or donate garden shovels and trowels.

Kitchen Equipment:

Collect muffin tins, egg-beaters, bowls, pots, pans and spoons of all kinds. You may be able to get a donation from a local thrift shop. Carpet samples, washed tires, old strollers, (kids love wheels), baskets, discarded keyboards, fax machines and telephones are also good.

4. **Plan for enough time to play and keep adults happy!**

Play should not be rushed. Allow for 2-4 hours of play during your event. Think of creative ways to keep adults occupied while children play; this could be a bonfire, a pot luck, or just an area with blankets and camp chairs, so adults can sit back and relax!

5. Assess the space you will use for this event.

We have found it helpful to designate a section of the park for adventure play. Look for an area that includes a few key features like mature trees fit for tire swings, sand/mud for digging, and gradual slopes or hills for rolling. Identify the perimeter of the play area with rope or pylons, and decide where the loose parts will be placed (ie. A cardboard tube placed near a sandpit will often become a tool for digging and exploration.)

6. On the big day, consider how you will lay out the loose parts.

You don't want to create obvious play stations but you do want to spread out the loose parts and create some hints as to how they might be used. Not all of the loose parts need be laid out on the site right away. You may release new parts as some things become too worn for play.

7. Tidy Up.

Make sure to include a bit of tidy-up time in your schedule and ask the children to help clean up too! Make sure you leave the park space just as you found it and properly recycle or dispose of any worn out loose parts.

Loose parts: What to collect!

For fort-building

- Cardboard boxes and tubes, all sizes
- Milk crates, buckets, spools
- Rope, duct tape, clips and clothes pegs
- Straw bales, if you can
- Tires, washed and rinsed at a local car wash
- Large fabric: tarps, netting, mesh fabric, old curtains
- Hoses and piping



For home and potion making

- Shells, sand, chalk, pine cones
- Kitchen stuff: pots and pans, lids, pitchers, bowls, whisks, spoons, spatulas, etc.
- Serving platters and baking trays
- Dress-up clothing
- Watering can, spades, shovels and trowels
- Consider bringing in sand and/or clean soil for sand and mud play

Playing Outside in All Weather

- Promote proper attire for play in different seasons.
- Be prepared to supplement! Anticipate that some kids may not have items necessary for outdoor play; with this in mind, consider having extra essential items to provide other children with for the Adventure Play Day.
- Find the fun in every season! Model enthusiasm for rainy or winter weather play and kids will get excited about it, too.
- When playing in winter or rainy weather, make sure children have a dry change of clothing to wear after play. Remind everyone coming to your event to bring extra clothing and appropriate clothing for the weather.



Tips for engaging your community

Inform your friends, family and neighbours about your event through emails, social media (your own news feed, as well as local Facebook groups), and community message boards.

Share your goals with the people you hope to engage. How is your event contributing to Earth Day Canada's goal of getting children outside for Earth Day?

Seek out community partners such as local businesses or environmental organizations that might help to provide you with loose parts (adventure play) or chalk, skipping rope and skateboard ramps (street play) and increase support.

Provide clear guidance on how to participate by providing all of the details anyone might need in order to attend your event. If you have volunteers, assign clear tasks.

Celebrate! Recognize and celebrate your success! Share photos afterward on social media, take time to highlight specific individuals or groups that helped to make the event work.

