

What Can We Do for Earth Day?

The future of Earth rests upon people's understanding and willingness to care for the environment. This understanding can begin with young children. Celebrate Earth Day by having children construct knowledge about nature and conservation.

Ecology Projects

- Adopt a play area in or near the school yard. Ask children to create a list of ideas to make this area more attractive. They can pull weeds, plant flowers, or pick up litter. Children can observe and record in science journals any insects or wildlife they see.

- Discover ways to reduce waste! For example, have children open their snacks or lunches and lay the food on a table. Examine the food wrappings and containers together and have children sort and classify them into recyclable items (lunch box, thermos, stainless steel spoon) and disposable items (paper bags, juice boxes, plastic spoon). Discuss ways they can make less garbage by using less packaging for their snacks and lunches. Brainstorm all the ways to recycle a brown paper lunch bag!

- Observing decomposition is a way to help children see the cycles of life and earth. Ask: "What happens to leaves when they fall from trees?" Provide five baby food jars more than half full with potting soil. Children can place a different material in each jar — plastic, paper scrap, carrot slice, leaf, and paper clip. Cover materials with soil, then sprinkle with water.



Children can draw pictures to label each jar. Ask them to predict which materials will decompose within 10 days. To help them understand 10 days, set 10 blocks or unifix cubes on a shelf. Each day of the experiment, put a block or cube in a bowl. On the tenth day, open the jars and verify children's predictions. Invite them to observe and draw pictures of the decomposed materials. Discuss the fact that some materials decompose and become part of the soil.

- Children can learn to nurture and observe plants through the creation of a terrarium. They can also observe the water cycle! After watering the terrarium, observe water vapor condensing on the top and sides. Count, record, and graph the water droplets.

- Involve your class in an activity such as worm composting, organic gardening, pond cleanup, or research with an environmental community organization. Groups like the San Francisco League of Urban Gardeners

(pictured in the News issue) or the N.Y. Central Park Charles A. Dana Discovery Center offer children hands-on experience in ecological projects.

The Teacher's Role

- Choose science experiences that allow children to observe and classify using any or all of their senses.

- Encourage children's divergent thinking with questions such as "What will happen if ...?" or "What other ways can you think of to ...?"

- Model the process of problem solving, making choices, and learning from them as you observe, listen, and ask open-ended questions.

- Provide occasions for children to communicate scientific findings. Always encourage them to write and draw. Ask, "How can we record this?"

- Keep a science portfolio for each child. A portfolio is a collection of student work that provides clear evidence of the child's knowledge, skills, strategies, and attitudes. Dated drawings, photos, charts, or graphs can be used as portfolio entries. A portfolio is not only a good assessment tool, but a source of self-esteem for the children.

You can be a valuable role model and guide, helping children discover and learn to appreciate the wonder of Earth's land resources.

— Lynn Cohen

Lynn Cohen, an early childhood curriculum specialist, teaches in the Great Neck Public Schools, Great Neck, N.Y. She appears with her class in this month's Photo Story!

RECOMMENDED SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

BOOKS

- *Nature's Green Umbrella: Tropical Rain Forests* by Gail Gibbons (Morrow). Pictures packed with information as well as text for adults.

- *Welcome to the Green House* by Jane Yolen (G.P. Putnam's Sons). Lyrical text and lush pictures introduce some rain forest animals in their habitat.

- *El jardín* by Isidro Sánchez (Lectorum). Colorful pictures and bold print introduce children to gardens.

- *Bitter Bananas* by Isaac Olaleye (Boyd Mills Press). Yusuf uses ingenuity to outwit the rain forest baboons who continually steal his sweet palm sap.

- *The Earth and I* by Frank Asch (Gulliver Green/Harcourt Brace & Co.) A simple story of a friendship between a boy and the earth.

- *Imagine* by Alison Lester (Houghton Mifflin). Children are invited to explore a variety of habitats through fanciful pictures.

AUDIOCASSETTES

- *Dirt Made My Lunch* by the Banana Slug String Band (Music for Little People). Songs about the natural world with upbeat rhythms.

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