

Playdates At Your Place

Exploring Magnets in Nature

Looking for ways to keep your young children engaged instead of a screen? Download the Playdates at Your Place PDF to learn how to easily set up your own home to offer the open-ended, play-based explorations your little one loves. Each month features a new hands-on theme such as nature (design a mud kitchen in your backyard) or gravity (create an object zipline in your living room). Spark wonder, foster creativity, and just plain have fun.

May Theme: Exploring Magnets in Nature

This month is all about the magic of magnetism. Have fun experimenting with how magnets work and interact outside in your backyard!

Exploration 1: Magnet Painting

This is a fun art exploration that is focused on the process over the product. Your little one will explore the power of magnets and what happens when paint is added to the mix. Hands-on experiences leave room for learning and fun!

Supplies:

- Cardboard box
- Piece of paper
- Magnets
- Metal (keep in mind supervising if the pieces are small)
- Tape (maybe)
- Paint (Acrylic is not washable)



Step One:

Place paper inside of the cardboard box. (Depending on how the paper is placed, you might want to tape a few of the corners so it lays flat).



Step Two:

Squeeze dime size amounts of different colored paint onto the paper. (Children love squeezing out paint on their own, but it is completely possible their attention will be focused on the act of squeezing rather than this activity).



Step Three:

Drop in the metal.



Step Four:

Use the magnet on the bottom of the box to control where the metal goes.



Step Five:

Add more paint and keep going. Add a new piece of paper and keep going. Or take out the final product and display this sweet abstract painting on the refrigerator with one of the magnets. :)

Final Product:



Exploration 2: Magnet Exploration with Your Refrigerator

Some of the most fun explorations are the ones that are part of their everyday life. This next exploration is set up with your home's refrigerator in mind. You use it every day, but not always for exploring! :)

Supplies:

- Magnets
- Random pieces of paper
- Objects from Nature (Pick these during a family walk)
- Pictures of friends and family
- Any other "loose part" you can think of

Grab items with different weights and textures. Part of the exploration is developing critical thinking skills and discovering success and “failure” for themselves. It will help them develop, “Why?”

Step One:

Set out random items in front of the refrigerator. I like to set it up in a beautiful way to make it more inviting, but fully prepared for the invitation to quickly get “messed up” That’s what we want! The setup’s purpose is to make it more appealing and desirable, then you see what they come up with.



Step Two:

Step back and see what they come up with. If they are sitting and looking, but not doing anything, give them a moment to keep thinking. That is still a sign of engagement.



Exploration 3: Painting with Nature

This is a fun way to add a unique twist to painting. Instead of using a paintbrush, we're going to use nature! Changing up “normal” helps little ones think outside the box and redefine their own rules for art. Once again, It's all about the process. Part of developing their art skills is having the opportunity to explore the medium without needing to “make” a specific thing in mind.

Supplies:

- Paper
- Paint
- Objects from Nature
- Clothes that can get messy

Step One:

Gather your items from nature and get the paint set up.



Step Two: Your little one can start grabbing whichever item from nature they would like to paint with and use the item as their “paintbrush.”



Exploration 4: Painting Nature

Just like the third exploration, this is a fun way to add a unique twist to painting. Instead of using paper to paint on, we're going to use nature! Once again, changing up "normal" helps little ones think outside the box and redefine their own rules for art. It's all about the process. Letting them explore is crucial in developing their creativity.

Supplies

- Objects from nature
- Paint
- Paint brush
- Paper or newspaper to help with mess

Step 1:

Set up the exploration. Lay out all of the supplies.



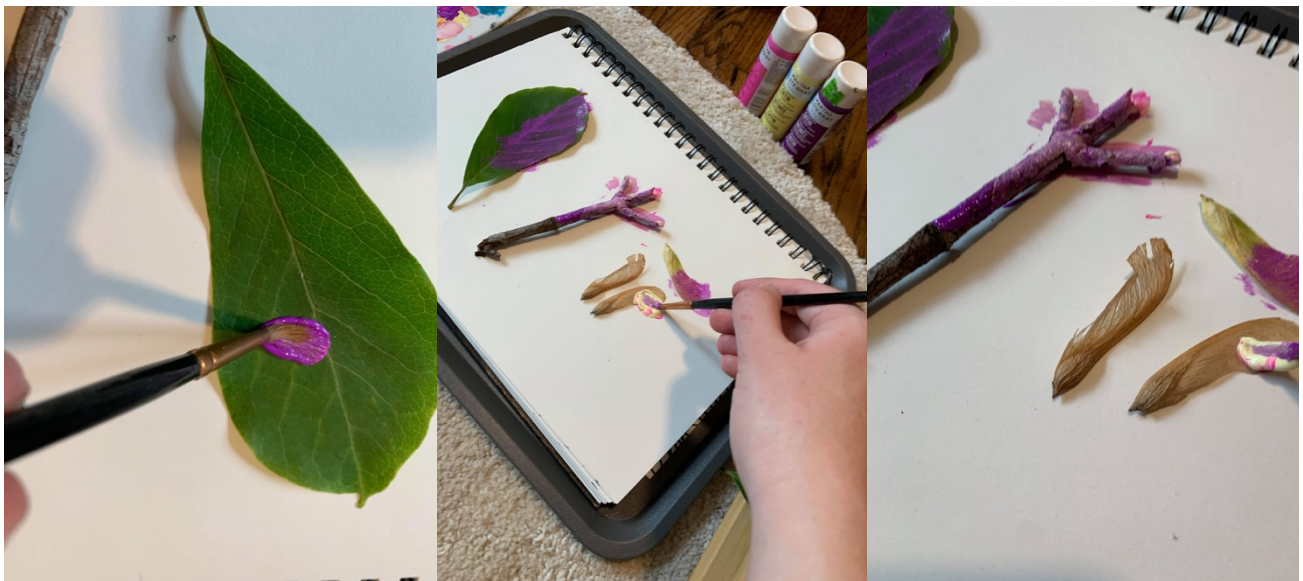
Step Two:

Choose the color you would like to start with.



Step Three:

Begin painting the natural treasures you collected.



Step Four:

Stop whenever you feel complete. (Here is a picture of both complete nature explorations).



Exploration 5: Natural Collection Magnets

Young children are natural collectors. Nurture their instinct to collect with this exploration.

Supplies:

- Magnetic “spice” type tins (pictured are .99 from Michael’s)
- Natural materials from a family walk or park expedition
- Basket or bag to collect items you find as you walk

Step One:

Gather supplies. Pick up some magnetic spice/gift tins (with window), and get outside with your family. Collect items from nature that capture interest. Are some types of objects more interesting or less interesting?

Step Two:

Lay out collected items and magnetic tins. Have your child fill the tins (or you can help fill the tins), and snap the lids on.



Step Three:

Place tins near the refrigerator, a baking sheet for lap play, or both. Let your child place and move the tins around. Are they harder to push around with their fingers, or to pull the tins off completely?



Notes:

By hot gluing the lids on, these tins can become more durable nature-magnetic building materials to stack and stick together. This can also be combined with Exploration 2: Magnet Exploration.