

The Art of Plants and Trees

~ an assortment of art activities to develop observation skills and sensory appreciation of nature

HAND TREES

Learning Objective: To illustrate the roots of a tree underground, and help children understand what is found under the ground.

Materials: Washable paints (brown, green, other colors as suggested below), wide paintbrushes, paper (at least 8.5" x 11", larger is better), crayons

Step-by step:

1. Give each child a piece of paper, positioned so that one short side of the paper is closest to the child.
2. Tell the children to put their hand down on the paper, with the bottom edge of their hand touching the bottom edge of the paper. Make a small dot at the tip of their middle finger, and ask them to remove their hand. Now, ask them to use a brown or black crayon to draw a horizontal line through the dot across the paper from side to side (this will be the surface of the ground).
3. Ask the children to think of things that you would find in dirt, and have them draw these below the line (worms, rocks, insects, etc.). Continue the discussion as long as appropriate. Be sure to re-direct any misguided suggestions (a cat! A fish!).
4. Next, have each child paint the trunk of the tree: a vertical line from the horizontal ground line to about two thirds of the way up the paper (you need to leave room for branches above the trunk)
5. Add roots: paint the child's hand with brown paint, using either a paint brush or a sponge. Turn the paper 180° so that it will be easier for the child to place their handprint at the base of the trunk.
6. Add branches: Turn the paper back to the original position, re-apply paint to child's hand as needed and have child add 3 - 5 handprints to the top of the trunk.
7. Add leaves: After wiping hands clean, the children dip their fingertips in green paint to print leaves on the tree branches. Encourage lots of leaves.

Art Extension: Paint the tree in different seasons: for spring, you can have the children finger-print pink or white "flowers" among the leaves; for fall, use a variety of autumn colors for the leaves; for winter, use blue paper and leave the branches bare, but add finger-printed white snowflakes all over the page.

PRESSED LEAF ART

Learning Objective: To explore the diversity of leaves and appreciate their beauty

Materials: Pressed leaves*, waxed paper & iron, or clear contact paper, colored construction paper, white glue, scissors.

*Enlist the kids in collecting leaves for this project - go on a "Leaf Hunt" or "Safari" where the kids collect freshly fallen leaves. A word of caution: Leaves that are dry and crumbly will not press well. A simple method of pressing leaves is to lay them flat between the pages of a phone book and put several heavy books or bricks on top of the phone book for several days. Alternatively, you can use a purchased or hand-made flower/leaf press.

Step-by step:

Placemats or Window Decorations:

1. Cut two sheets of waxed paper to desired size.
2. Position pressed leaves on first sheet of waxed paper
3. Lay 2nd sheet of waxed paper over leaves on waxed paper, and iron lightly on low setting until waxed melts and fuses the two pages together.
4. Trim edges.

Gift Tags or Book Marks:

1. Cut construction paper to desired size.
2. Position pressed leaves on paper, and use a very small amount of glue to hold them in place.
3. After design is finished, cover both sides of the gift tag or book mark with contact paper, and trim edges if needed.

WEED WEAVING

Learning Objective: To explore the diversity of weeds, grasses and other plants and learn simple weaving techniques.

Materials: A weaving "loom" - a board of any size with equal numbers of finishing nails pounded in two parallel lines along opposite edges. For younger children, we've used a 8" x 10" board with 6 nails pounded in along two opposite sides; string; 2 sticks that are longer than the width of the weaving loom; an assortment of natural materials, such as weeds, grasses, leaves, pieces of cotton batting (to represent cotton, a plant-based fiber)

Step-by step:

1. Setting up the loom is best done by an adult: before you string the loom place one of the sticks on the outside of each row of nails; as you string the loom, wrap the weaving string around these sticks.
2. Starting on the bottom edge of the frame, weave the grass and weeds in-and-out of the loom strings. (over-under-over-....)To create a denser weave, after every few pieces of grass and weeds, use your fingers to pull the woven fibers in more closely to the bottom.
3. When the weaving is completed, carefully remove the woven piece from the loom by lifting up the sticks. Tighten up any of the leftover strings and tie closer to the sticks as needed. Tie an extra piece of string or yarn to both ends of one of the sticks in order to hang the finished weaving.

TWO METHODS OF LEAF PRINTING

Learning Objective: To explore the diversity of trees and other plants, sharpen observation skills

Materials: Washable paints (NOT watercolor) or acrylic paint (for fabric printing), paintbrushes, small sponges, paper (e.g. cardstock, Bristol, construction paper) or fabric, waxed paper, assortment of leaves.

Step-by step:

Cloud-print Leaf Outlines:

1. Pour a small amount of washable paint into a shallow bowl or small plate.
2. Select a leaf that can lie flat on the paper; larger leaves work best for younger hands.
3. After the leaf is placed on the paper, do not move it until you are finished with the outline. If you are right-handed, hold the leaf carefully in place with a finger of left hand.
4. Dip the sponge in water and squeeze out most of the water. Dip the damp sponge into the paint on the plate, and then dab the sponge around the leaf, making sure to paint around the entire leaf.
5. Carefully remove the leaf to reveal the outline print. These make great greeting cards or room decorations. This would also be a cool t-shirt design with permanent paint such as acrylic paint.

Direct Leaf Printing

1. Can be done with any paint, on your choice of paper or fabric, but I'll describe how to print t-shirts as an example. You will need acrylic paint (available in a wide variety of colors at craft supply stores such as Michaels). Note that acrylic paint does NOT come out of clothing, so take care when using this paint. Cover the work surface with an old vinyl tablecloth or newsprint.
2. Insert a piece of corrugated cardboard as large as the entire area to be printed into the t-shirt (between the front and back of shirt).
3. Identify the side of the leaf with the veins (the bumpy lines) and lay the leaf vein-side up on a piece of waxed paper.
4. Lightly apply paint using a small brush. For best results, brush from the center of the leaf outwards.
5. Pick up the leaf using the stem, and place it in position onto the t-shirt, paint-side down. Take care not to move the leaf after you've positioned it, or the paint will smudge.
6. Lay a clean piece of waxed paper over the leaf, and then gently rub your fingers over the entire leaf surface (through the waxed paper).
7. Lift off the waxed paper, and carefully remove the leaf by picking it upwards.
8. Continue printing leaves until desired design is achieved.
9. Let paint dry completely before wearing shirt!

SUGGESTED ART/CRAFT REFERENCE BOOKS:

- *Keeping a Nature Journal: Discover a whole new way of seeing the world around you.* (2000). By Clare Walker Leslie. Storey Books.
- *Nature Printing with herbs, Fruits & Flowers* (1996) By Laura Donnelly Bethmann. Storey Books
- *Earthways: Simple Environmental Activities for Young Children* (1992) by Carol Petrash. Gryphon House Publishing.
- *Nature Crafts for Kids: 50 Fantastic Things to Make with Mother Nature's Help* (1992) by Gwen Diehn & Terry Krautwurst. Sterling/Lark Book.