

HOW PLANTS AID CHILDREN'S PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH



We always hear about the copious mental and physical health benefits of spending time outdoors. Studies have proven that children who spend time immersed in nature to connect with their surroundings are much happier and attentive than children who spend more time indoors, exposed to TV and video games. However, for children who live in harsh climates such as the Canadian winters, spending time outdoors and connecting with nature can be limited.

GOOD NEWS IS,

the health benefits of outdoor exposure can still be achieved without hiking or building a sandcastle. Taking care of household plants may be the simplest way to achieve the same advantages as outdoor time.



Our classrooms at Pine Lake Montessori School are filled with household plants, herb gardens, and fresh flowers for children ages 18 months to 9 years to nurture in their respective classrooms. The plethora of benefits include gaining respect for their immediate environment, understanding global ecology, and admiring the value of what human contribution offers.

This activity does not have to be a complicated task. Children can be taught to lightly and gently wipe the dust off the leaves of a houseplant, then touch the soil to feel the moisture content to determine if the plant needs water. Small jars are perfect for children with small hands to successfully watering the plants.



TODDLER

4 YEAR-OLD

6 YEAR-OLD



The level of difficulty can increase based on the child's age. While a toddler could only do the watering and dusting, a 4 year-old child could cut the dead leaves with a pair of scissors, while a 6 year-old could help with the fertilization process.

Tending to plants develops children's' creativity and imagination, helps concentration and ability to focus, refines their control of movement, increases responsibility and dedication, and helps with building higher self-esteem.

ADDITIONAL BONUSES:

This practice can be extended to teaching a child about botany. Children could learn different parts of a plant, different parts of a leaf or a flower. The difficulty of Botany lessons can advance with the child's age, but gaining their general intrigue and curiosity is also fostered. For instance, a child in lower elementary could learn the functions of different parts of a plant and how they contribute to the wellbeing of a plant, resulting in critical thinking skills.

EXTENSIONS ON THIS ACTIVITY:



Children could make herb/vegetable gardens indoors in the winter and transfer them to outside during the summer season for the whole family to enjoy the fresh at home.

Children can grow flowers in pots or in their backyard use them for making beautiful flower arrangements to beautify their environment.



A GOOD READ:

We always recommend a book to the parents during our Parent Partnership Nights. We currently recommend *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder* by American author and journalist Richard Louv. He writes about the health benefits of exposing children to nature in a generation more often wired to digital screens and video games.