



## **Back pocket Outdoor Learning Ideas for School-Agers** (Karen DeBord, NC Cooperative Extension, NCSU)

- Does your outdoor space offer small group and large groups places to spend time? Can older children mentor and help with younger children? Is there space to have planned scavenger hunts and games as well as read under a tree or giggle on a bench?
- Let youth set and chart their own personal goals for physical activity level, volunteer activities, helping younger children, working hard at school, helping others.
- Plan active fun science activities: water quality testing, GIS mapping, climate change charting, solar and lunar observation, GPS.
- How can the setting lend itself to connecting with peers (mail boxes and letter writing, porches, rocking chairs, benches)
- What activity settings can you incorporate outside (fort building, gardening, outdoor block play, wood working, microscopes, pets, hiking, wildlife, rock climbing, water garden, collecting dishes, nets, fishing, camping, outdoor food preparation).
- What sorts of hobbies can you encourage (collecting, photography, small engine work, carpentry, small appliance repair).
- What resource people might you invite to share about aspects of outdoors (wildlife expert, skier, recycling expert, personal trainer, nutrition expert, water expert, biker, naturalist, bird watcher, entomologist, bee keeper, horticulturalist, master gardener)
- Can you incorporate art or music activities outside, how about homework help? Green space is said to be rejuvenating!
- What sorts of community activities might you encourage; walk-a-thons, bike-a-thon, environmental stewardship, litter collection.
- Involve parents in learning about the value of outdoor preparing announcements and ideas for parents. Explain the value of outdoor play. Give at-home outdoor ideas. Give parents data on the value of active play versus sedentary (TV, video) play. Suggest some of the following at-home activities for families: Plant flowers, Collect rocks, Go camping, Play with blocks, Bike, Swim, Paint with water on sidewalk or wall, Draw with chalk on the sidewalk, Picnic, Walk to the library, Berry Picking, Pick up litter, Rake the leaves, Bird watch, Scavenger hunt, Collect bugs, Listen to noises outside, Wash the car, Plant a small garden, Repot a plant, Sing, Walk to the store, Wash the dog, Read together, Refinish furniture, paint the porch railings, Make a kite, Play cards, Build a fort, Plan a trip, Make sandwiches together, Dance, Play basketball, Take a walk, Go fishing, Play Touch football, Climb a tree, Stargaze at night, What else can you think of? The important thing is to be together, get fresh air and move a little in the natural environment.
- Involve families by planning outdoor family days (outdoor picnics, beach day, carnivals, family play day, building things together, gardening)
- Invite families to bring interesting natural items from their yards or vacations (snail shells, seashells, pine cones, birds nests, etc). Discuss item with children, place in science center. Expand the learning through related art activities, books, and musical activities about the item.
- Adorn your outside with children's art, whimsical projects you make (totem pole, wind chimes, banners or flags, natural weavings, paper mache creatures, scare crows, more)
- Model curiosity. Notice bugs and comment on them, ask questions about them, invite children to explore and examine nature. Be active in learning but not intrusive, encourage problem solving but add hints (have you tried...), tips (once I heard that xyz worked...) and tools (have you looked that up in the dictionary, online?).