



Nature's loose parts

The loose parts station encourages learners to work together to collect natural objects from an outdoor space, creating opportunities for open-ended play and exploration of numbers, shapes and pattern. Loose parts are a great way to connect children to nature in both indoor and outdoor settings. This continuous provision station can be set up indoors or outdoors (but being outdoors may cause less mess).

Teaching time

Continuous provision station

Learning outcomes

- have a deep understanding of number to 10, including the composition of each number
- subitise (recognise quantities without counting) up to 5
- explore and represent patterns within numbers up to 10, including evens and odds, double facts and how quantities can be distributed equally
- compare quantities up to 10 in different contexts, recognising when one quantity is greater than, less than or the same as the other quantity

Step by step

An engaging way to create a loose parts area is to visit a natural outdoor space with children and collect items together. This may be on your site, or a local green space.

Explore different objects together and discuss texture, weight, safety, shape and colour.

Back at your setting, set up your loose parts area (indoors or outdoors) to become a child-led space for enquiry learning. When introducing a loose parts zone, ensure safe boundaries are established and group expectations are agreed.

Loose parts enable learners to connect to nature and explore number and shape through natural objects.

Loose parts can also create time and space to discover and learn about wildlife through creating habitat piles, bird feeding stations, nesting boxes and much more.

Green Skills



Suitable for

Early Years

Location

Indoors
Outdoors

Season

Spring
Summer
Autumn
Winter

What you'll need

Natural loose parts can consist of: straw, mud, pinecones, sticks or twigs, leaves, tree slices, bamboo canes, conkers and other natural objects that children express an interest in

Optional: recycled loose parts such as cardboard boxes, rope and off-cuts

Key vocabulary

Numbers up to 10
More / less / the same
Pattern

Support and extension opportunities

For more activities supporting the Mathematics Early Learning Goal, see the Mathematics overview page, or filter for resources by Subject.



National Education Nature Park



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