

# BRING THE OUTSIDE IN

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Spring is the season to celebrate nature and the outdoors. These simple suggestions can help your service nurture children's nature needs.

Children love playing outside and it is particularly important for them to be exposed to nature for their immediate and long-term well-being.

This need is recognised by the requirements of the National Quality Standard (NQS), Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and My Time, Our Place (MTOp). However, some services find it challenging to provide sufficient natural elements and activities to meet these requirements.

Bringing natural elements indoors can help overcome this challenge and also help nourish children's senses and foster their respect for the environment.

Most importantly, it provides educators with better opportunities to develop children's knowledge and understanding of the natural environment and the role they play in caring for it.

Some of the suggestions listed below may seem obvious yet, surprisingly, services often overlook them when assessing their practices against the requirements of the NQS, and when writing their Quality Improvement Plan. Others may not be practical in every service but may prompt you to think of similar ways to bring the outside in as well as inspire your creativity.

These simple suggestions can help your service meet the requirements and nurture children's nature needs.

## 1. Create a natural feel

The next best thing to being outdoors is seeing and feeling it. Let in plenty of natural light and fresh air by opening windows and pulling back curtains and blinds.

You could also dress windows in a way that will enrich the view by placing pot plants to frame the scenery.

Reflect nature in the furniture and décor using colours, patterns and textures. For example, using greens, yellows and blues or incorporating natural items like sea shells, rocks and plants. Something as simple as cane storage baskets or even tree stumps as stools can be effective.

Be eco-friendly by using sustainable resources such as recycled paper and biodegradable plastics.

Keep the room spacious by minimising clutter and displaying resources in an organised way.

## 2. Intensify the feeling

Plants not only look great, they help keep the air clean and add energy to the room.

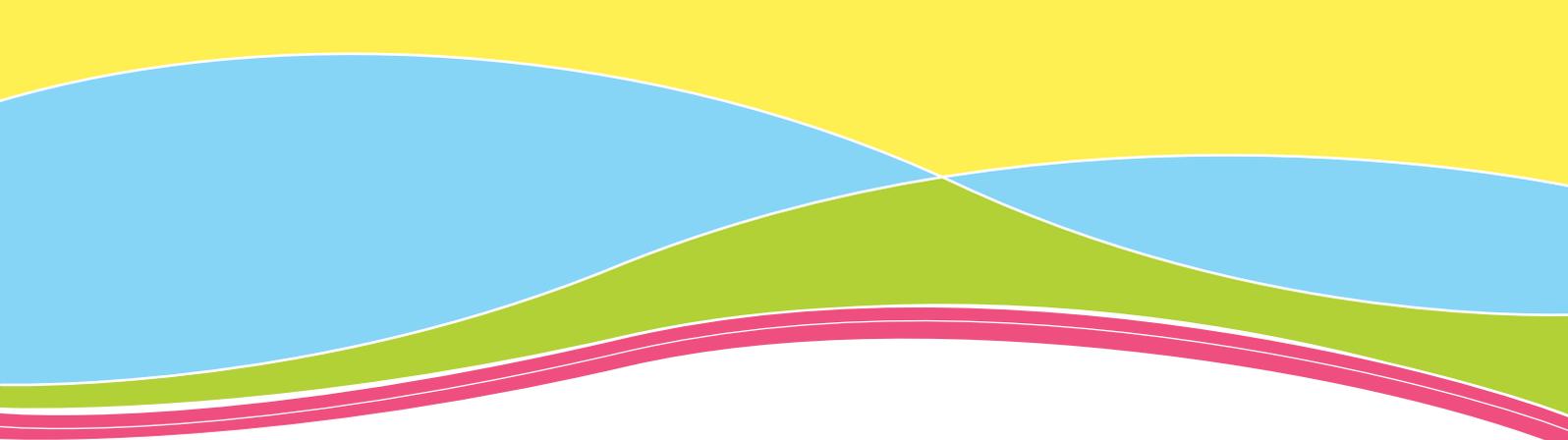
Use some fresh flowers, potted plants, terrariums or hydroponics or even a bonsai tree to keep the children intrigued.

Fresh fruits and vegetables make wonderful decorations and are healthy and tasty.

Involve the children by sprouting potatoes, carrot tops and seeds, or start a vegetable garden if possible.



Remind children of the changing seasons by displaying items that reflect the current season. For spring, you could use blooming branches and flowers.



A fun way to get children involved is to introduce creatures. Worm and ant farms, fish tanks, turtles, frogs, crabs or a butterfly kit provide them with the opportunity to connect and understand nature.

### **3. Embed the feeling**

A great way to bring the outdoors in is to incorporate natural elements into activities.

Art and craft projects that use natural items like pinecones, feathers, leaves, shells, sand, rocks and clay are great, and children really enjoy creating their own natural masterpieces.

Loose parts from nature can be used for construction and manipulative play alongside blocks and puzzles.

In dramatic play, items can be used to feed the children's imagination. For example, twigs, bark and leaves can be used to complement a camping scene.

Reading time can be set up with cushions and sheepskin under a tree branch and books that are nature themed, both fiction and non-fiction.

### **4. Keep the feeling going**

Children love collections; gather and store interesting natural items for a science box and bring it out when needed.

Invite the children to contribute to the collection and help rearrange or categorise.

Items for the science box could be birds' nests, bee hives and feathers. Over time, the boxes will hold interesting and unusual items and will make setting up nature areas much easier.

Involve children in decorating the room with items they find while playing outside, or display photos taken on excursions.

### **5. Remind them**

Keep the children interested by providing them with hands on, sensory experiences so they can see, feel, smell and taste nature.

Sensory science tables are a good idea to engage all these senses. Have the children listen to nature sounds like rain, waterfalls, surf and wind sounds during quiet time.

Evoke memories by displaying items gathered on an excursion, display photographs with captions to introduce topics or make

books and stories about nature and their experiences to prompt recall.

Revisit documentation using learning stories and made-books about nature. When writing them, use as many sensory words as possible to enrich their memory of the experience. This will also help children who were not there place themselves in the moment.

### **6. Over to you**

Bringing the outside in is only part of what you can do to ignite children's interest in nature. Your role is pivotal. Use intentional teaching strategies such as:

- Sharing your interest in and knowledge of nature
- Provoking their curiosity by rearranging the natural elements in the room
- Choosing a thought provoking book, CD, DVD or YouTube videos and asking open-ended questions

Find ways to increase your knowledge and pass it on to the children. There are an ever increasing number of resources at your fingertips online.

Bringing the outside in is an easy way to meet the requirements of the NQs, EYLF and MTOP (NQS 3.1.1, 3.2.1, 3.2.2, 3.3.2. EYLF and MTOP LO 2, 3, 4, 5).