

Environmentally friendly activities for children

What do you do with all the used items from your child care facility? What happens to the cereal boxes, used envelopes, paper towel rolls and baby food jars? How often do you try to reuse or recycle used items? Do you offer these items to others before placing them in the trash?

Americans generate trash at an amazing rate. It is estimated that the average American generates about four pounds of trash per person each day. Currently less than 35 per cent of households and less than 10 per cent of businesses in the U.S. recycle. (Environmental Protection Agency)

Reuse is a large part of reducing waste. It can save you from having to buy new items, and reduces the amount of trash you throw away. Uses for reused materials are only limited by imagination. Reused materials can be used in the art area, the dramatic play area, the writing center, the block area, and anywhere else the children or you find them useful. Allow children to help themselves to reused materials to use in their own ways. Allowing children to decide how to use the materials is one way to foster the development of creativity.

Don't throw those old milk containers away! Reuse them! Milk containers can be used for many different art, craft, and other fun activities for children.

Milk jug flower pot

Children can reuse empty plastic milk containers as they make flower pots, which can be used as gifts.

What you need:

Plastic gallon, half gallon, or quart milk jugs (1 per child)	Fabric, felt, and paper scraps	Craft glue	Flowers or flower seeds
	Scissors	Potting soil	Old plates
		Small rocks	

What you do:

Give each child a milk container to rinse out with cool, clear water. An adult should cut the top off the plastic jug just underneath the handle. Try to cut it evenly, leaving a square bowl-shaped container. The adult should cover the rough edges with fabric with children's help, and the adult should use scissors to pierce holes on in the bottom for drainage. Children can decorate the flower pot with fabric, paper scraps, and glue. When the glue is dry, have the children put small rocks in the bottom of the flower pot. Cover the rocks with soil. Plant the flower or seeds and cover with more soil. Place the plate under the flower pot so the water won't leak through the drainage holes.

Tip: This flower pot is for indoor use. The paper and glue will not hold up outdoors.

Milk carton bird feeder

What you need:

Clean empty quart sized milk carton (1 per child)	Scissors	Hole punch
	String/cord	Bird seed

What you do:

Children can rinse out a milk carton with cool clean water. An adult should use scissors to cut a hole in the front of each milk carton. The hole should be large enough for a bird to enter but not so large that it will tip over when filled with bird seed. Use a hole punch to put a hole in the top of the carton. Each child can string the piece of string or cord through the hole on their carton. Have children fill their carton with birdseed. Hang each bird feeder on a hook or branch of a tree.

What happens to the banana peels, apple cores, orange peels, and chunks of carrots and cucumbers left over from lunch or snack time? Instead of throwing them into the trash can, children can help to compost them.

Composting is the natural breaking down of organic materials such as fruit and vegetable scraps, leaves, yard trimmings, and grass clippings. Composting is a practical way for child care facilities to reduce waste by doing something useful with materials that might otherwise be thrown away. Composting is wonderful for the garden soil and plants and is an excellent way to turn everyday waste, such as fruit and vegetable peels, eggshells, and

coffee grounds, into something very useful.

Get children involved to help them understand the benefits of composting. Children can help collect the items that can be put into the composting bin. They can collect grass and leaves from the yard and make sure that the correct food scraps and fruit and vegetable peelings are placed in a bucket in the kitchen to be added to the compost bin or pile outside. Children can also help adults water and mix the compost. If you are not ready to start a compost pile in the backyard, think about making this smaller version with the children in your care.

Composting in a bottle activity

In this activity, children can observe changes in compost materials in their own personalized compost bin.

What you need:

- A clear two liter plastic soda bottle
- 2 cups of fruit and vegetable scraps, chopped in small pieces
- 1 cup of grass clippings and leaves
- 1 cup of dirt
- 1 tablespoon of fertilizer
- 1 cup of shredded newspaper
- Spray bottle containing water
- Spoons for the soil, scraps, leaves, grass, etc.
- Tape

What you do:

1. Remove the label from the soda bottle, leave the lid on, and cut around the bottle about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way up to form a flip top. Don't cut it totally off! Adults, you may need to do the cutting, depending on the ages of the children.
2. Fold the flip top back on the bottle to fill it as detailed below.
3. Place soil to cover the bottom. If the soil is dry, moisten it by spraying it with water from the spray bottle.
4. Add a thin layer of fruit scraps. Cover with a thin layer of dirt. Sprinkle a tablespoon of fertilizer. Add a layer of leaves and grass.
5. Continue layering materials until the bottle is almost full.
6. When finished, tape the flip top back in place and mark with a permanent marker the height of the compost on the bottle.
7. Put in a sunny spot, such as on a window sill.
8. Every day roll the bottle on the floor to circulate the material.
9. If it gets too moist take the lid off to help dry it out a little bit.
10. If it gets too dry add a little water.
11. The compost should be ready to use in 30 days or when most of the fruit and vegetable scraps are broken down.

Use the compost for planting a garden or to provide nutrition for plants in your home or outdoors.

Reading spotlight

Compost Stew, a book written by Mary McKenna Sidda, introduces composting to children by teaching children what goes into a composting bin. The book is filled with many interesting and colorful illustrations.

Book bibliography: Sidda, Mary McKenna. *Compost Stew*. New York: Tricycle Press, 2010.

References: Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Retrieved August 31, 2012. <http://www.epa.gov/osw>

Choking cautions

Young children can choke on small objects and toy parts. All items used for children under three years of age and any children who put toys in their mouths should be at least $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in diameter and between 1 inch and $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches in length. Oval balls and toys should be at least $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in diameter. Toys should meet federal small parts standards. Any toys or games labeled as unsuitable for children under three should not be used.

Other items that pose a safety risk and should not be accessible to children under three include, but are not limited to: button batteries, magnets, plastic bags, styrofoam objects, coins, balloons, latex gloves, and glitter.

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Claudia C. Mincemoyer, Ph.D., Better Kid Care Program Director
341 North Science Park Road – Suite 208, State College, PA 16803
Web site: extension.psu.edu/youth/betterkidcare

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