



## Reconnect Your Kids with Nature This Summer

As school lets out for the summer, warmer weather provides the perfect opportunity to rediscover the outdoors. Experiencing nature's wonders firsthand—admiring a garter snake slithering in the grass, planting flowers in the yard or devouring strawberries picked fresh from the garden—can prove as captivating as anything on the TV or video-game screen. So, begin today to get your kids outside to celebrate summer with our living planet.

Parents don't have to look far to identify great outdoor activities that are nearby, easy and fun. Studies reveal the benefits of outdoor activity are enormous. More-active kids do better academically. They score higher on tests of concentration and self-discipline. They show better coordination, balance and agility, and they're sick less often. They are less likely to bully, be violent and to vandalize. And they are more likely to develop their imagination and the sense of wonder.

"Unlike television, nature does not steal time; it amplifies it," contends award-winning journalist and child advocate Richard Louv, whose book *Last Child in the Woods* coined the term "nature-deficit disorder" and also triggered a nationwide "No Child Left Indoors" movement.

Research shows that not as many children today are discovering the outdoors.

- In a typical week, only 6 percent of children ages 9 to 13 play outside on their own.
- A typical child in the United States watches more than three hours of television daily.
- The decline in outdoor adventuring is cited as one reason why the obesity rate has more than tripled the past three decades, to 17 percent from 5 percent, for children ages 12 to 19.

"We realize it can be a challenge for parents to identify outdoor activities their kids will consider fun," says Amy Gath, outdoor living and gardening expert at The Scotts Miracle-Gro Company. Gath explains that there actually are hundreds of ways parents can get the kids outside and in tune with their natural surroundings this summer—that it just takes a little creativity to think beyond the four walls of their home.

Gath's nature and garden-related suggestions include:

- **Starting a learning garden in the backyard or neighborhood plot.** This helps kids learn about taking care of plants (and the animals drawn to the plants) and respecting the environment and nearby nature. Your kids can take photos of the garden as it grows and produces whatever they've planted.



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- **Bird watching and identifying plants and trees that appear in the yard.** These activities often entice older kids, especially if they understand that a periodic bird or plant census helps detect any significant shifts in their populations.
- **Recording sight, smell, hearing and touch observations on walks in your neighborhood.** This activity helps kids hone their sensory-observation skills. They can log the information they gather and even make drawings to chronicle their observations.

By making outdoor activity fun, parents play an integral role in helping children appreciate the beauty of nature and understand the importance of being environmental stewards, starting in their own backyard.