

Rock on!

Creating Rock Gardens with Young Children

It's not surprising that children have an interest in rocks and are immediately drawn to them. Rocks are intriguing, beautiful materials that have multiple options for use; rocks can become anything! So why not create a rock garden in your child care environment?

Rock on!

When starting a rock garden, take time to make plans and start simple. You will need a safe, comfortable outdoor space where children can explore, build, sculpt, and play with rocks of varying sizes and types. Consider a good location that is shady, flat, and has ample space for small groups of children to work in. Mulch can be added before rocks are brought in for a better building surface.

Some rock choices are river and creek rock, ocean rocks, granite, marble scraps, small pavers, sandstone, and a variety of polished and unpolished stones. Visit local building supply stores, garden centers, and craft stores. Landscaping centers might donate some materials or offer their "scrap" pieces. By spreading the word with your families, you may receive donated rocks as well as physical help.

Before introducing the rock garden to children and families, take time to discuss the idea and ask if they have any suggestions or recommendations.

Brainstorm ideas on what might make a good rock garden.

- What might you need?
- How can you make it safe?
- Get inspired! Look at pictures of rock sculptures and natural rock monuments. Check your local library for books such as *Stone*, by Andy Goldsworthy, or *On My Beach There Are Many Pebbles*, by Leo Lionni.

Ideas for children working with rocks

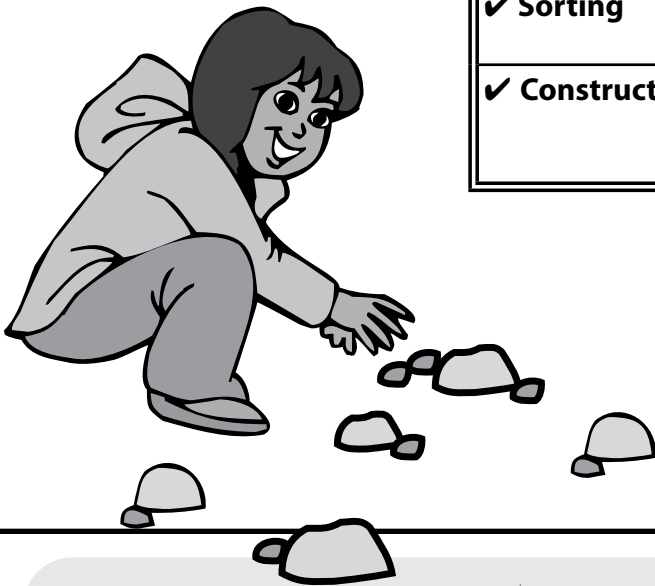
Before using the rock garden, it is a good idea to introduce rocks on a smaller scale, such as in a small group meeting time. Children can become somewhat familiar with different types of rocks, look at pictures of rock sculptures, and start to plan how they might like to use them. This is a fun time to try stacking rocks and balancing them. After the rock garden is established, consider adding items that children request, such as buckets, sticks, wood pieces, water, trucks, wagons, shovels, paper, pencils, logs, pinecones, seashells, leaves, fabric, and tubes.



Photograph provided by Nancy Jones

Take time to make a list of safe and fair play rules with the children, such as the following:

- Rocks can be built up, stacked, lined up, but not thrown or smashed
- Ask friends if they want help or if you need some of their rocks
- Show kindness and respect for other's work; please don't knock down or ruin anyone's rock sculpture, design, or construction
- Rock workers need good space to work; watch where you are walking
- When you are done, you can save your work or put the rocks back in their piles
- Wear shoes
- Rocks should be easy to pick up; not too heavy or too big
- All rock play is supervised by an adult



Ideas for early educators in the rock garden:

- Keep children safe
- Be open to the children's ideas (such as wanting to bring piles of rocks inside or add water to their play)
- Listen and watch the children's ideas: How can you support or extend their ideas?
- Photograph their work and share the experience with families; document conversations you hear children having
- Help the children make a rock garden sign

Learning from rock gardens

Through rock garden explorations, children can explore geology, art, nature, science, math, and a variety of developmental skills:

✓ Counting	✓ Planning
✓ One-to-one correspondence	✓ Exploring size, shape, weight, and mass
✓ Patterns	✓ Problem solving
✓ Classification	✓ Large and small motor skills
✓ Sorting	✓ Social skills
✓ Construction/building skills	✓ Language Development and communication

PENNSSTATE



College of Agricultural Sciences
Cooperative Extension

Dr. James E. Van Horn, CFLE, Better Kid Care Program Director

Developed by Christine Belinda, Penn State Better Kid Care Program
253 Easterly Parkway, State College, PA 16801 • Phone: 800-452-9108 • Website: betterkidcare.psu.edu

Supported by funds from the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, Office of Child Development and Early Learning.

This publication is available in alternative media on request.

Penn State is committed to affirmative action, equal opportunity, and the diversity of its work force.
Copyright © 2007 The Pennsylvania State University