Creating Affordable Nature Play Settings

Goals:

- At the end of this presentation we hope you will...
  - Have lots of ideas for even the most limited budgets
  - Feel confident in your team’s abilities & resources
  - Know where to look for materials
  - Know what you can make out of the materials

How far can your dollar go?

- What’s the first question many people ask when they see a plan...
- “How much will it cost?”
- There are many ways to improve the play area with a diversity of natural settings that are affordable (or even free!)

How much do you think this play house costs?
How much do you think this play house costs?
A. $1,000  
B. $4,000  
C. $8,000  
D. $10,000

How much do you think this play house costs?
A. $1,000  
B. $4,000  
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D. $10,000

How much do you think this play equipment costs?

How much do you think this preschool play equipment costs?
A. $12,000  
B. $20,000  
C. $30,000  
D. $45,000
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Now compare that to this space:

How much do you think this preschool play equipment costs?

A. $12,000  B. $20,000  C. $30,000  D. $45,000

All about materials!

In this presentation we will address:
1. Log elements
2. Bamboo elements
3. Planted elements
4. Tire planters
5. Timber/lumber elements
6. Hardscape elements
7. Earth/mud/sand
8. Natural loose parts

In all cases, remember:
- Intentional uses
- Appropriate installation
- Supervision & maintenance
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Log Elements
• Where do I get logs?
  – Tree removal companies
  – Local clear-cutting projects (new developments, new roads)
  – Recently fallen trees from storms
  – Your community yards and properties

Log Elements
• More specifics:
  – Hardwoods, not softwood
  – Best kind of wood = red cedar, oak, maple, etc.
  – How long will they last?

Log Elements
• How can I use logs?
  – Seats
  – Benches
  – Tree cookies
  – Infant pull-up bars
  – Natural building materials
  – Natural playhouses
  – Balance beams

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Log elements play opportunities

Bamboo Elements
- Where do I get bamboo?
  - Find a stand of it, and cut what you need
  - Talk to the owner first, make sure you have permission to cut

Bamboo Elements
- How do I cut bamboo?
  - Aim for thicker bamboo, 1” or more
  - Use serrated saw, cut just above a node (don’t leave a hollow segment at the end)
  - Use the saw to cut branches off from the outside
  - Careful of splinters!

Bamboo Elements
- More specifics:
  - How long will it last?
    - 3-4 years or so, not forever.
  - How do you attach them together?
    - Zip ties are good, but watch out for sharp edges (better to use them out of reach of children)
    - Jute twine also works well, but only lasts a year.
**Bamboo Elements**

- How can I use bamboo?
  - Vine teepee
  - Natural building materials
  - Plant protection fencing
  - Vine trellis

**Bamboo idea gallery**

**Bamboo elements play opportunities**

**Planted Elements**

- What are planted elements?
  - Sunflower patch (or maze or house)
  - Wildflower patch
  - Vegetable garden
  - Ornamental grass maze
Planted Elements

- How do I create them?
  - Pick a sunny site
  - Prepare the soil
  - Plant the seeds
  - Water, weed, let them grow!

Planted Elements

- More specifics: Preparing the soil
  - Different options...
    1. Till/dig
    2. Till & mix in organic
    3. Don’t till soil, just overlay with organic
  - What is organic material?
    - Aged manure (cow, chicken, etc)
    - Leaf or wood chip compost
    - Mushroom or garden compost
    - Peat moss

Planted Elements

More specifics: Seeds
  - Buy from local garden centers or online
  - Wildflowers and Vegetable seeds
    - Look at online seed sources and catalogs
    - Follow planting instructions on packets

Planted Elements: Seed Saving
Planted Elements

More specifics: Plants
- Local garden centers may put perennials and shrubs on end-of-summer clearance
- Look for sales September-early Spring as nurseries clear out last season's plants

Planted Elements

- Ways to enhance play with planted settings
  - Place a winding stepping stone path through the planted patch
  - Place several log seats for a small sitting nook among the flowers or vegetables
  - Add a bird bath to attract songbirds
  - Plant in a square or circle with an open entryway for a “house” setting

Planted Elements idea gallery

Planted Elements idea gallery
Planted Elements idea gallery

Planted elements play opportunities

Tire planters
- Where can I get tires?
  - Ask around at tire stores and car repair shops, often they are either free or cost very little.

Tire planters
- More specifics:
  - Don’t use tires for edible plants (fruits or vegetables), because of the potential for leaching chemicals.
  - If stacking two or three tires, stabilize by attaching adjoining tire walls (using bolts, for example)
  - Painting the tires keeps the plants cooler
Tire planters

- What can I make with them?
  - Path edging
  - Buffer plantings
  - Surrounding a council circle or setting
  - Mound the tire planters over fill dirt to create a planted hill

Tire planters idea gallery

Timber/Lumber Elements

- Where do I get timber/lumber?
  - It’s not a good idea to reuse old lumber
  - Buying it is best
Timber/Lumber Elements

- **Caution** when building a planting bed where vegetables or fruits may be grown
  - Don’t use railroad ties
  - Don’t use pressure-treated lumber that may be older than 2006

![Railroad ties / pressure-treated lumber from before 2006](image1)

Timber/Lumber Elements

- What are some basic things can I use it for?
  - Raised planting beds (6” – 18” tall)
  - Timber terraced beds
  - Timber blocks for loose parts

![Timber/Lumber idea gallery](image2)
Timber/Lumber elements play opportunities

Hardscape Elements
- Stepping stones: pathway or sensory patio
- Recycled concrete
- Stones/ boulders

Hardscape Elements
- Where do I get stepping stones?
  - DIY
  - “Odd lots”: leftovers from local stone yard
  - Local home improvement store

Hardscape Elements idea gallery
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Hardscape Elements idea gallery

Earth and Mud Play Elements
- What are some easy earth and mud play options?
  - Digging area
  - Mud café
  - Sand play
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Earth and Mud Play Elements Idea Gallery

Natural Loose Parts

Questions and Discussion

Preventing Obesity by Design POD³

www.naturalearning.org

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