

SIMPLE SUMMER FUN!

Fun in the summer need not be complicated or high tech. The simple, fun activities that you did when you were a kid are still fun for kids now. Just get out with them and have a great time, too. Here are a number of easy activities to do with your children this summer that take only a small amount of preparation and use supplies you are likely to already have. Taking only a little effort, this type of summer fun builds amazing childhood memories!

FOR PRESCHOOLERS:

“Painting” the house

On a warm sunny day, give your preschooler a small “house paint paintbrush” (with a wide brush) and a bucket or plastic container of plain water. When you dip the paint brush in the water and “paint” the house, the water makes the house turn a darker color until it dries. Preschoolers are amazed. This was a favorite for my preschoolers for a while.

Painting a sheet

We strung an old white sheet up between two trees in the back yard and provided poster paints for the kids. They painted the sheet, Jackson Pollack like and created a masterpiece which was then left to dry and much later washed (on its own) in the machine with salted water to set the color. We used the sheet for forts, as a stage curtain and as a picnic blanket. Another year, it was made into a cape.

“Cooking” in buckets

Simple but effective. Get all the little Tupperware pieces and measuring cups you have plus lots of manual kitchen utensils such as hand beaters and whisks. Set them out with medium sized water filled storage bins in the back yard. You’ll need to be there next to toddlers/preschoolers for this one as you can’t have them topple into the water. Put bubbles in some of the bins but not others and help the kids experiment with the utensils and pouring water back and forth in the bins. Bizarrely, this is fun for hours.

Crash test

Spread a wet paper towel across a large bucket, so that it is stretched and clings a bit down the side. Then, with your toddler, slowly and carefully place marbles or pebbles on the paper towel. Eventually the paper towel will not be able to hold the weight and the pebbles or marbles will crash down into the bucket. If your child is sensitive to noise, this may not be something to try, but if they would be thrilled with the anticipation of how many marbles or pebbles can be placed before the crash, it can be a great time! Count as you place the pebbles/marbles. Try it again to see if you can best your score!

Picnic

Make picnicking a regular part of your summer! Maybe every Friday can be picnic day/night! Keep the meal very simple so it isn’t too much work for you. Get your kids to help in ways that they can manage. Just be sure to bring along a blanket or tablecloth and you are ready to go! Perhaps try a new park every week. When we first moved to Portland and I didn’t know the city at all, we covered the kitchen wall with a map of the town. A couple of times a week we would choose a patch of green on the map for a picnic. We discovered all sorts of fabulous parks, tucked in neighborhoods all over the city. The kids became connoisseurs of playground equipment and I learned how to drive all over Portland. It was a blast!

FOR SCHOOL-AGED KIDS:

BBQed pizza! (What?!)

Yes, it is yummy and remains a favorite activity with my teens! Either try your own simple pizza dough recipe or buy prepared dough from Trader Joes or other stores offering it. Then, give each child a small ball of it.(each bag of dough from Trader Joe’s divides in 4) Have them roll it out with a rolling pin on a lot of flour. Once it is thin and roundish enough, brush a side of the dough

with olive oil and set it on the grill, on medium-low until it is cooked on one side. (You'll have to be right beside it so it doesn't burn) Then, bring it back in to the house. Now it is time for "decorating"! Put out a jar of spaghetti sauce or pesto sauce and as many pizza toppings as you can think of: olives, sausage, ham, green peppers...whatever your kids will eat and some you thing might be a stretch. Of course lots of grated cheese is important to have out. Before the kids begin to decorate, brush the ungrilled side of the dough with olive oil. Then, flip in over onto a plate. Have the kids spread sauce on the GRILLED side of the dough and then they can get creative! After the masterpieces are ready, BBQ them on low with the lid closed for about 15 minutes. If it is possible to put them on one side of the grill (which you turn off after 5 minutes) while the other side is at medium; that works well. My kids still LOVE to eat their own BBQed pizza creations!

Sprinkler

It's simple. You did it as a kid. Yet despite all the other fancy things available it is still a hit. Put on the sprinkler and invite a few kids over. Viola!

Homemade popsicles

I asked my son what his favorite summer things were to do and he said "making homemade popsicles" Interesting. I didn't know. These, too, are easy. Get a mold at your grocery store, buy some great juice..like pineapple...and have your kids make popsicles to eat after you turn off the sprinkler!

Making fairy habitats

For those of you who have kids that love Spiderwick Chronicles or any other of the fabulous books with fairies or other magical creatures, you may find that starting to build a fairy habitat is something that kids can go back to again and again...even boys. We collected moss and twigs and other natural elements and created little worlds in large flower pots and an abandoned wheelbarrow. You could create the worlds just about anywhere including just a spot in the garden. With wire and a glue gun you can use the twigs and grasses to create fairy furniture. Once a habitat was finished we bought little ceramic fairies to place in them.

Running a lemonade stand

Yup, you did this one too. The children get together every summer in our neighborhood and put together a lemonade stand, alternating locations. They brainstorm what they will need, ask different Moms for supplies and bring everything together. We have old and young at the stand so have never worried about "Stranger Danger" but if you are worried about this, don't dissuade them from this entrepreneurial venture, just be there in the back ground where you can observe them to keep them safe...reading, gardening, whatever...Just allow them to be in charge.

Leaf Silhouette T-Shirts.

This is pretty cool. Michael's and Target and even the Dollar Store sometimes have really cheap, plain t-shirts. Buy the very brightest you can find. Place cardboard inside of them where the body usually is. Lay them out on the lawn on a windless day. Then, have the kids collect interesting shaped flat leaves and lay them on top of the t-shirts. Fill a spray bottle with water and a small amount (1/4 cup?) of bleach. Spray the mixture in a fine mist over the t-shirts and let them dry, undisturbed for a few hours. You should now have a bright t-shirt now with a white misty front. When the leaves are taken off the shirt, their silhouettes are bright like the original t-shirt against a misty white background. This was a very fun one!

Visiting City Fountains...with your swim suit!

Portland has a number of fabulous city parks with fountains. One of our favorite things to do in the summer is to load up the car with our bikes then park the car under the highway just north of OMSI. We then put on backpacks which hold our towels and snacks and bike on the water front esplanade up to the Rose Garden Fountain in front of the stadium. WOW! What a blast this fountain is to play in...unpredictable shots of water shoot up from the ground to surprised shouts of glee all around! After 45 minutes or so of water play, we towel off, put on our shorts, get back on our bikes and get back on the bike path and follow the steel bridge over the river and along the west river front down to the Salmon Street fountain where we play for another 45 minutes or so. After a small picnic or at least a snack while we people watch and dry off, we continue our loop across the Hawthorn Bridge back to OMSI. Great, no cost summer fun!! Do remember the fountain at Jamison Square in the Pearl....It is much calmer but is another fun one!