



MAGNIFICENT MUD

an essential ingredient to childhood

Gritty, cold, wet, sloppy, icky, sticky, joyous mud – the secret weapon in your sensory-rich outdoor toolkit. It may be messy, it may even be inconvenient, but it brings with it the makings of pure happiness.

Mud is one of those things that can make us – parents – cringe. The dirty footprints, filthy bathtub and extra washing are enough to make anyone shout, “Stay out of the mud!” But, you’d be doing your children a disservice. It’s all about the cost, versus the benefit. Yes, it will most likely create some work, especially if your children are young, but the learning opportunities are significant.

Mud play has an extremely important role to play in sensory development, providing a platform for creativity, imagination,

resourcefulness and free expression. It’s also known to strengthen the immune system and trigger the release of serotonin – a chemical that helps to regulate mood.

Mud can, literally, make kids happy.

Whether it’s the creation of a simple mud pie, painting with mud, or experimenting with how it feels on their body, the benefits are well worth the effort.

- 1 Introduce mud play to your little ones by offering mud in containers and allowing them to explore the texture and smell. Try putting things in the mud for them to retrieve and demonstrate the squelching with fingers and toes
- 2 Encourage mud play as a regular part of your backyard offering by constructing a mud kitchen from up-cycled pallets or wood, setting it up with old pots, pans, mixing utensils and measuring cups. If you’re not the handy type, mud kitchens can be purchased, or created with a few simple items, such as a children’s table and buckets or bowls
- 3 Set-up a mud painting station at an appropriate workspace, such as a mud kitchen or table, remembering it will get dirty. You’ll need a bowl of dirt, a bowl of water, a bowl for mixing the ‘paint’, a stick for stirring, a range of large paint brushes and thick paper. You can also use seedpods, cones and leaves to create texture, stamping and rolling them over the painting. As well as little hands, fingers, feet and toes – let their creativity take over
- 4 Initiate a mud pie ‘bake off’. Collect flowers, seedpods, leaves, herbs, cones and twigs, whatever natural loose parts you have available, and lay them out at a suitable workstation, along with a bowl of dirt, a bowl of water, a spare bowl for mixing and a ladle or large spoon. Small tongs, measuring cups, sieves, whisks, muffin trays, eggbeaters and a mortar and pestle also come in handy. When finished, share your favourite thing about each pie
- 5 If you’re eager and open to the mess, try creating a temporary mud pit with a giant tarp (just add dirt, water and squealing children).

**If the dirt in your backyard isn’t suitable, the best thing to buy is a mix of loam and clay from your local landscape supplier. Materials such as potting mix are not suitable and the labels on these items should be followed.*

*** Before picking any plants for use by children, it’s important to research the plants you intend to use to determine safety, sensitivity and toxicity.*