

Green activities to do with your kids



Kids today are more aware of environmental concerns than any generation. You can help them develop positive, healthy, green habits and attitudes with fun, easy activities. Who knows? You and the rest of the family could learn a thing or two, too!

Switch to CFLs

If you haven't yet made the switch to compact fluorescent bulbs (CFLs), put your little one in charge to help her learn the benefits. Show her the difference between CFLs and regular incandescent bulbs; then, ask her to count the fixtures in the house that need replacements. If she's old enough, let her help you switch them out.

UL Safety Tip:

Never let a young child change a light bulb; make sure your fixtures and bulbs carry the UL Mark.

Build a Birdfeeder

With just a few household items, your child can make a simple bird feeder for small, feathered visitors to the backyard. Wash out a milk carton. Using a craft knife (young kids need mom to help with this) on one side, cut out square-shaped opening, about 3 inches square. Repeat on the other side. Stick a short pencil stub under the hole for a perch and seal the top with waterproof tape. Fill with seed. Hang the bird feeder on a tree limb with a sturdy cord or a piece a wire. Explain to your child that she's not only helping wildlife, but he's also reusing materials that otherwise would have gone into the garbage.

UL Safety Tip:

Unless your child is old enough, handle the cutting and hanging chores yourself.

Gaze at the Stars

Few video games or DVDs can compare with the amazing show on display every night right above your head. Find a simple stargazing guide at the library or on the Internet, grab a blanket and take the kids outside on a clear, dark night when there's no moon. If you can, pick a spot away from house and street lights. Lie on your backs and look for groups of stars shown in your guide such as the Big and Little Dippers.

UL Safety Tip:

Stay in a familiar area and take a good flashlight.

Patrol for Pollution

It's easy to become complacent about things you see every day. Encourage your kids to watch for things that are causing pollution and have them do their parts to help solve the problem. Keep a pad and pencil in the car so whenever you go out, they can write down what they consider to be harmful to the environment. Are cars belching out smoke and exhaust? Is garbage piling up on the sidewalks? Are the streets and parks littered with trash? Have them write a letter telling the mayor or governor what they saw and how they think the problems could be solved.

UL Safety Tip:

Never write and drive at the same time. If your child needs help writing down his ideas, wait until you get home.

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Set Up a Recycling Center

Whether you're already recycling or you could use a little more organization, your child will learn faster if you involve her in the process. Give her a few cardboard boxes and a marker. Write out how you want the boxes labeled, for example, "newspapers," "aluminum cans" and "glass containers" and let her label and decorate them.

UL Safety Tip:

Make sure your markers are non toxic.

Make a Natural Postcard

The next time you and the family go on a hike, camp out or spend the afternoon in the backyard or park, collect small objects such as twigs, bark, nuts, shells and rocks to create an artistic record of your outing. First, make a square frame by tying four sticks together with jute, then wrap the jute back and forth to create a base for the other objects. Attach them with craft glue, small hooks or pieces of wire in a creative design.

UL Safety Tip:

Watch your child closely when she's working with sharp objects such as wire, hooks and sticks.

Hunt for Flowers

Simply being more aware of nature can help kids want to take better care of it. Give your child a notebook and marker and walk through the neighborhood or park looking for interesting plants and flowers. Have her draw pictures of the ones he likes. Then go to the library or online and try to identify what he drew.

UL Safety Tip:

Watch out for poisonous plants and make sure she doesn't touch or put any in his mouth.

Shop the Farmers Market

Instead of limiting your child's food shopping experiences to the grocery store, take her to the farmers market to teach her about food origins and responsible farming. Find a friendly farmer willing to answer her questions about how food is grown.

UL Safety Tip:

Plan your day so you can go straight home from the farmers market. Food quality can go down and perishables such as meats and eggs can be unsafe if you leave them sitting in your car.

Grow Your Own

No, you don't need an acre to teach your child the wonders of gardening. Clear out an unused window box or recycle a milk jug to create a container herb garden. Poke a few holes in the bottom for drainage and place a few stones over the holes, then plant an easy-to-grow variety like mint or fennel. Teach her to feed and water the garden and show her how you use the results when you cook.

UL Safety Tip:

Keep sharp objects and gardening tools out of your child's reach when you're not around.

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