

Children's Health Update

Outdoor Play Is Key To Healthy Child Development

(NAPSA)—In the past, most kids spent the bulk of their play time outdoors, socializing and exercising in backyards, at playgrounds and parks. With technology advances and the ever-growing amount of cable and Internet content, children now are more likely to be found plopped in front a television or computer screen than exploring and interacting with the natural world. The contemporary child's play environment has changed dramatically and not all the effects are positive.

According to the American Association for the Child's Right to Play, playing outdoors is more than just a joy of childhood. It is essential for both the mental and physical well-being of children—outdoor active play promotes cognitive development, encourages creativity and keeps children moving. In fact, research has shown that children who actively play outdoors during early childhood have a tendency to be smarter, to score higher on tests and to exhibit more creativity.

The good news for parents—the best learning environment for children may be right in the backyard. The backyard provides a great outlet through which children can nurture creativity, develop social and cognitive skills and get physical exercise. It's a natural environment for kids to explore and isn't too far from supervision.

Follow these tips to design a kid-friendly, playful yard.

Sun vs. Shade

Where does your yard receive the most sun? Play areas should be positioned where shade is



available during the hottest times of day.

Specialized Play Areas

Outdoor playcenters—complete with slides, swings, climbing walls and sandboxes—are great additions to keep kids on the go. Do your research and choose equipment that is safe, easy to assemble and built to last. For something that keeps the kids active but also won't be an eyesore, you can check out Huffy's new Playcenters at www.huffyplaycenters.com.

Gardens

Keep delicate, toxic and thorny plants away from play areas. Instead, incorporate into your yard flowers that are bright (zinnias), fragrant (lavender) and tactile (lamb's ears) so that kids can explore their unique colors, smells and unusual textures. Let older children help you pick out flowers to plant.

Water

Keep in mind that children should never be left unattended around fountains, water features, pools or spas. Drowning can occur in as little as one inch of water.

The next time your kids are mesmerized by the latest-and-greatest in technology or TV, move them outdoors to keep their healthy development on the right track.