

Soil Play

Learning objectives:

Children will explore the texture, smell and feel of soil and herbs using their senses.

Children will begin to understand that plants grow from soil and need care such as, gentle handling, watering and sunlight.

Children will develop early physical skills through scooping, filling, tipping and patting with their hands and simple tools.



Practitioner knowledge:

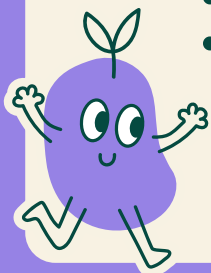
Soil and growing experiences are valuable for babies and toddlers because they offer rich sensory learning through touch, smell and close observation, while also introducing early understanding of the natural world and how things grow.

Gardening and soil play support curiosity, fine and gross motor development, early language, and a sense of care for living things.

Sensory exploration with natural materials is widely recognised as beneficial in early years. Gardening activities also help young children build connections with nature through hands-on, meaningful experiences.

For this activity you will need

- Tuff tray
- Compost or a food safe alternative such as Weetabix, oats, ground cereal or ground biscuits
- Fresh herbs like mint, rosemary or basil
- Spades or scoops
- Small plant pots
- Cloths for easy clean-up
- Toy insects or large seeds such as pumpkin or sunflower (optional)



Activity

Set up a tuff tray with a shallow layer of soil, a selection of fresh herbs, child-sized spades and small plant pots.

Encourage children to touch, pat, scoop and fill as they explore the smell and texture of the materials.

Practitioners can model simple language such as “soil,” “pot,” “leaf,” and “grow,” while supporting children to investigate at their own pace.

For very young children or children who are still mouthing objects, offer a taste-safe alternative such as crushed Weetabix, oats, ground cereal or another edible sensory base instead of soil.

