

There's plenty of 'nature' in Toronto for kids to learn about

[to toronto.com/opinion-story/10016155-there-s-plenty-of-nature-in-toronto-for-kids-to-learn-about](https://toronto.com/opinion-story/10016155-there-s-plenty-of-nature-in-toronto-for-kids-to-learn-about)

June 14, 2020

| Saturday, February 20, 2021

toronto.com

NOTICE TO READERS:

[Home](#) / [Opinion](#) / [There's Plenty Of 'Nature' In Toronto...](#)

'Teaching children about nature doesn't have to be complicated,' writes Jennifer Deathe

Opinion Jun 14, 2020 by Jennifer Deathe Toronto.com

Jennifer Deathe is admissions manager at Toronto Waldorf Academy. - Jennifer Deathe photo

Think back to your own childhood. Chances are, many of your most beloved memories are of time spent outdoors. Children thrive when they are given the chance to connect with nature. It's an engaging experience that provides rich context for deeper learning and studies even show that children are more focused, ready to learn and better behaved after spending time outdoors.

However, for many of us in Toronto, the great outdoors is paved and lined with sprawling cityscape. Compounding the issue, the coronavirus crisis has shut down summer camps and even Waldorf Academy's neighbour Spadina House Gardens. Facing these challenges, Toronto parents will have to get creative to make sure their children have plenty of opportunities to build a relationship with the natural world.

Teaching children about nature doesn't have to be complicated. It can be as easy as walking along Toronto's waterfront and observing birds, trees and wildlife. Another simple option would be to visit one of the many beautiful parks and green spaces in Toronto. As a parent,



just by making a point to get outside, teaches children's how important it is.

Another idea for a seasonal activity that is great for children to learn about nature is making seed bombs. These can be tossed in your yard or around your neighbourhood and contain everything needed to sprout native plants. To make your own seed bombs, have your children mix together two parts native seeds, three parts compost, five parts clay powder and two parts water, then roll the mixture into golf-ball sized spheres. These are left to dry for two weeks before they are ready to start their journey.

Even if you do your research online, the learning starts as soon as you begin to select your seeds. It is important to use non-invasive species to protect natural wildlife. Good choices are native plants such as wild geranium, swamp milkweed and wild strawberry.

Once your seed bombs are placed outdoors, the rain and sunshine will take care of the rest. This is the beauty of choosing native plants and a valuable lesson for children to learn. After enough time to germinate, children get to observe plants sprout from the ground where they last saw the seed bomb, mature into beautiful flowering plants, and complete the cycle of life in the fall and winter.

Connecting with nature through activities like seed bombs, gardening, or even just a walk through the forest nurtures a lifelong love of nature. Young children benefit from observing the phenomena of our four seasons. Elementary-aged children can learn where food comes from and practice math by cooking their harvest in the kitchen. And middle and high schoolers gain confidence in themselves and their abilities when they know the skill of gardening.

If these activities are inaccessible, remember that nature still exists in the most urban of dwellings. Children can observe how storms rapidly change the environment or discover where animals find shelter in the city. For all ages, time spent with the natural world primes them to learn science and reinforces classroom settings. But maybe the most important reason parents should do what they can to foster outdoor time — even in an urban setting — is to plant a figurative seed for their children to cultivate a healthy relationship with the environment.

Jennifer Deathe is admissions manager at Toronto Waldorf Academy.