

Connecting Children of All Abilities to Nature Play & Therapeutic Gardens

Essential Reading List

This list was curated and developed by early childhood experts Ruth Wilson, author and Children & Nature Network Research Library curator, and Louise Chawla, professor emerita with the University of Colorado Boulder and member of the Children & Nature Network's Scientific Advisory Council.

Books

Say “Yes!” to Kids with Disabilities. Elizabeth Bullard, Hannah Gallagher & Adana Protonentis. Seattle Children's PlayGarden. 127 pages.

This inclusion toolkit was developed by the Seattle Children's PlayGarden to help other programs feel empowered to include children with disabilities into their programs. It can be downloaded for free or purchased as a hard copy through the Seattle Children's PlayGarden. The toolkit offers specific suggestions on how to make environments and activities, not only accessible, but also inclusive in such venues as parks and playgrounds, after-school sports and extracurricular activities, and museums and zoos. It offers practical strategies for designing and implementing inclusive activities in a variety of areas, including art, music, and cooking. Other special features include (1) a Glossary specific to terminology relating to disabilities, (2) an Inclusion Checklist, (3) possible accommodations for children with different types of disability, and (4) stories from kids, parents, and service providers. [Link to PDF](#)

Inclusive Preschool Through the Seasons: Lessons and Stories from 10 Years of Nature-Based Preschool. Liz Bullard, Sophie Barnett-Dyer, Hannah Gallagher & Mica Rood. Seattle Children's PlayGarden. 80 pages.

The book offers a nature-based seasonal curriculum with specific lesson plans for preschool children, suggestions for adaptations, and helpful resources. It was developed by the Seattle Children's PlayGarden as a resource for parents, early childhood educators, administrators and community members interested in learning how to support inclusive play-based programming for all young children. This book can be downloaded for free or purchased as a hard copy through the Seattle Children's PlayGarden. [Visit Website](#)

Gardening for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders and Special Educational Needs. Natasha Etherington. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2012. 160 pages.

This book presents a simple gardening program that parents and teachers can use with children on the autism spectrum to promote their physical, cognitive, social and emotional development. Suggestions are offered on how to adapt gardening activities for children with differing needs, including children with developmental disabilities, behavioral difficulties, and mobility challenges. The book also includes appendices on how to conduct a risk assessment, how to lead relaxation and visualization exercises, and examples of themed containers and gardens. [Link to Publisher](#)

Mindfulness & Nature-Based Therapeutic Techniques for Children: Creative Activities for Emotion Regulation, Resilience and Connectedness. Cheryl Fisher. PESI Publications & Media, 2019. 158 pages.

This book is designed for therapists and educators interested in harnessing the power of nature-based and mindfulness activities to promote children's cognitive, emotional, and physical development, including skills in sensory integration and self-regulation. The suggested activities are evidence-based, practical and fun. [Link to Publisher](#)

Balanced and Barefoot: How Unrestricted Outdoor Play Makes for Strong, Confident, and Capable Children. Angela Hanscom (with foreword by Richard Louv). New Harbinger Publications, 2022. 256 pages.

This book discusses the psychological and physical benefits that children gain from time outdoors on a regular basis. The alternative – too much time indoors – is linked to a number of health and cognitive difficulties, such as attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), emotion regulation and sensory processing issues. Included in the book are some easy-to-implement strategies for helping children engage more fully with the outdoor environment. [Link to Publisher](#)

Nature-Based Therapy: A Practitioner's Guide to Working Outdoors with Children, Youth, and Families. Nevin Harper, Kathryn Rose & David Segal. New Society, 2019. 304 pages.

This book presents an evidence-based framework for conducting nature-based therapy in outdoor environments. The book includes an overview of the research and theory supporting this approach to therapy and offers practical guidance on how to work with children, youth and families in an outdoor setting. [Link to Publisher](#)

Forest School and Autism. Michael James. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2018. 208 pages.

This book offers a practical guide to adapting Forest School techniques and outdoor learning for children with autism. The book is based on the research-supported understanding that nature engagement and outdoor learning experiences offer specific benefits to students with autism, including increased social skills, improved sensory function and enhanced self-esteem. The guide includes ideas for establishing a forest school, safety tips and suggestions that practitioners can incorporate into their daily routines.

[Link to Publisher](#)

Play for All Guidelines. Robin Moore & Susan M. Goltsman (authors), Daniel S. Iacofano (editor). MIG Communications, 1992. 305 pages.

A comprehensive design resource for integrating children of all abilities into the same play area. It addresses safety and risk management, maintenance, accessibility and integration, as well as principles of play spaces that promote healthy child development. Many recommendations include nature. The guidelines were reviewed by 136 professionals in the fields of child development, recreation therapy, education, law, landscape architecture and park management. [Link to Publisher](#)

Therapy in the Great Outdoors: A Start-Up Guide to Nature-Based Pediatric Practice with 44 Kid-Tested Activities. Laura Park Figueroa. Outdoor Kids Occupational Therapy, 2019. 187 pages.

This book was developed for pediatric therapy practitioners and other professionals interested in promoting the sensory processing, mental health, motor coordination and social play skills of young children through outdoor adventures. The book includes tips for managing logistics and planning outdoor therapy sessions, a suggested list of low-cost supplies for getting started, and over 40 simple therapy activities for outdoor nature-based sessions. [Visit Website](#)

The Nature of Inclusive Play: A Guide for Designers, Educators, and Therapists. Amy Wagenfeld & Chad Kennedy. Routledge, 2023. 234 pages.

Written by an occupational therapist and landscape designer who have experience promoting nature play, this book is filled with practical information to create inviting outdoor play settings for children of all abilities. After discussing the benefits of outdoor play for all children, the book presents design guidelines to create opportunities that afford joy and build developmental skills. It includes nine case studies of inclusive outdoor play spaces that integrate its principles. [Link to Publisher](#)

Nature-Based Allied Health Practice: Creative and Evidence-Based Strategies. Amy Wagenfeld & Shannon Marder. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2023. 352 pages.

This accessible guide offers workable, creative strategies for integrating nature into therapy. It also discusses the evidence-based rationale for doing so. Included are simple and fun activity ideas for patients or clients of all ages, from younger children to older adults. Suggestions are offered on how to adapt the different therapeutic activities and materials to meet the needs of most individuals and groups. Information and resources are also offered on how to assess readiness for integrating nature into one's program, how to create plans for such integration and how to evaluate the impact on patients or clients. [Link to Publisher](#)

Naturally Inclusive: Engaging Children of All Abilities Outdoors. Ruth Wilson. Gryphon House, 2022. 178 pages.

This book is written for families, educators, youth leaders, health care providers, landscape designers, researchers and others who want to provide access to nature for children of all abilities in their homes, schools and communities, as well as children in hospitals and other health care settings. It is filled with practical wisdom and research findings regarding how nature can be a healing agent for children, and how to integrate children of all abilities into nature spaces and programs. Its 10 chapters cover how engaging with nature contributes to healthy child development, and summarize research and practice related to nature-based therapy, inclusive design for play and learning in nature, animal-assisted therapy, and horticultural therapy. [Link to Publisher](#)

Book Chapters

LATIS Forum on Therapeutic Gardens — Well-being by Nature: Therapeutic Gardens for Children (pp. 35-50). Robin Moore & Nilda Cosco. American Society of Landscape Architects, 2005.

This contribution to the Landscape Architecture Technical Information Series (LATIS) is based on the premise that engagement with nature is “therapeutic” for all children, in the sense of health-promoting. Although special design features and accommodations are required for children with special needs, nature play spaces should accommodate all abilities. This publication presents illustrated design principles to achieve this goal, including Location, Site Planning, Security, Microclimates, Accessibility and Usability, Needs for Both Challenge and Rest, Child-Nature Interactions, Diversity of Natural Settings, Group Settings, Activity Settings, Integrating Arts, Participation in Design, and Maintenance.

[Download PDF](#)

“Healing Gardens for Children.” Robin Moore. In *Healing Gardens: Therapeutic Benefits and Design Recommendations* (pp. 323-384). Clare Cooper Marcus & Marni Barnes. John Wiley and Sons, 1999.

This comprehensive chapter defines healing gardens as a “nature-based, protected haven for children and youth that can incorporate the creative roles of professional staff and volunteers,” where “through caring for nature, comes healing.” It shows how gardens can be adapted to children with different needs: children temporarily disabled by an accident, illness or traumatic experience; those with lifelong physical or mental impairments; those with terminal illnesses; and children at risk from negative physical and social environments. After a history of healing gardens for children, the chapter explains how engagement with nature is inherently therapeutic, and discusses play therapy outdoors, horticultural therapy and animal therapy. It presents a typology of different types of therapeutic gardens and five extended case studies that illustrate each type. It closes with 18 design guidelines that cover all aspects of garden planning, design and use. [Link to Website](#)

*This reading list is just one of the resources included in an online toolkit titled ***Connecting Children of All Abilities to Nature Play & Therapeutic Gardens***. Find the [full toolkit here](#), in the Children & Nature Network resource hub.*