**LET’S GO OUTSIDE & PLAY!**

Ask a child what their favorite part of the school day is and they will most likely say, OUTSIDE! Open the door and turn your learning environment inside out. Share the wonders of the natural world with young children while increasing moderate to vigorous activity, fostering creativity and imagination, activating all the senses, extending children’s language skills, encouraging loud and unstructured free play. The many health benefits of outdoor play (vitamin D exposure, increased immunity, better sleep, lower stress levels) create happy and healthy children. Here are some ideas of what you can do in your Outdoor Classroom:

* Roll down a grassy hill. No hill? Pull out a tumbling mat and have children roll like a log from one end to the other.
* Pull out the parachute and move it like the wind, gently blowing (slow and soft movements up and down) or create strong gusty gales (fast and quick shaking movements). When the wind blows in the autumn, leaves fall from the trees, twirling and dancing in the wind. Place some real leaves on the parachute and have the children shake the parachute accordingly as you describe how the wind is blowing, either gently or more briskly. After a big, stormy strong wind the leaves have all scattered. Children will have fun as they “rake” up the leaves that have blown (shaken) off of the parachute.
* Pick up a stick, find a rock, climb a tree, look for bugs, smell the flowers, collect leaves, go on a nature hike, dig in the dirt, jump in a puddle, have fun in the mud.
* Play “I Spy Outside.” Take turns saying, “I spy something \_\_\_\_\_” and then together run to that object.
* “Wanna Play Chase?” Children just wanna run and it’s always fun to run with or after someone. Tell the children to always ask the person they want to be chase, “Wanna play chase? I’ll chase you first and then you can chase me. On your mark, get set, go!”
* Move like the animals -- fly like a bird, slither like a snake, scamper like a squirrel, walk like a bear, jump like a frog or a rabbit.
* Set up a Nature Scavenger Hunt. After assessing your playground or yard, make a list of things that the children have to find. The list might include an acorn, a Y-shaped twig, a pinecone, a clover, a pill bug, a gray rock, or whatever else might be in the immediate environment. Naturally, the list will depend on the season and the age of the hunters.
* Make a Sidewalk Chalk Obstacle Course. Using sidewalk chalk create a maze for children to follow using different movement skills. Draw -- straight lines, curvy roads, zig-zag paths for children to walk on; lily pads to frog jump onto; shapes to hop into; rivers to cross; and rainbows to jump over.

Make nature and the outdoors a part of your teaching. Lead the way and be the first to say, “Let’s Go Outside & Play!