



Ages: 2-5 yrs.

Time Required: 10-20 min

Discovery Time: Dirt!

Get your hands in the dirt and paint with mud! (Ages: 2+)

Materials

- Dirt
- Water
- Paper
- Paint brush, stick or popsicle stick
- Magnifying glass (optional)
- Food coloring (optional)

Try this!

Step 1: Collect soft, dark dirt.

Step 2: Remove sticks and leaves and other debris.

Step 3: Put it in a container and add water.

Step 4: Mix into a nice thick mud.

Step 5: Put your mud into a container (ice trays work great).

Step 6: Add food coloring if you want color (adult help required!).

Step 7: Use a paint brush, popsicle stick, stick, leaf or your fingers to create a picture!

Step 8: Share your art with friends and family!



What's going on?

Dirt can be dry and sandy or wet and mucky. But where does all this dirt come from? Some dirt comes from erosion, or when wind and water break down rock. Other dirt comes from decomposition, like when a mushroom breaks down a rotting log. Some animals like earthworms also help break down old leaves and other vegetation into dirt. As more dirt is created, it piles up into what is called the soil column. By digging in the soil column, we can find out about the past from artifacts from people long ago, to fossils from extinct plants and animals.

So why is dirt important? Well, the dirt that we step on house many of the most important nutrients that plants need to survive. It is also where much of our fresh water is stored, and the dirt can actually help filter this water from many different types of pollutants. It also provides a

habitat for billions of organisms and supplies most of the antibiotics used to fight diseases. Humans also use dirt for many purposes, from the construction of homes and cities to the agriculture that helps feed us and many other animals that we depend on for consumption.

Extension Activity

When you are scooping up the dirt for the activity you may notice that it is full of lots of living creatures! Have fun observing those creatures in the dirt. Scoop up the dirt from different locations in your yard and count how many creatures you have from each sample you take. Maybe the dirt in some areas in your yard will have more creatures than others, ask yourself why can this happen? Another interesting observation you can make is if some samples have a greater variety of creatures than others. You can also have more fun with the paint! Since you are already painting as part of your activity, try to draw/paint some of the creatures you found in the dirt. Use a magnifying glass to look at the little details of your creatures like: how many legs do they have, do they have wings, etc.?

Additional Resources

You can visit <https://www.floridamuseum.ufl.edu/educators/resource/discovery-time-dirt/> to learn more about dirt and see a step-by-step guide on how to make this activity! You can also check out other cool activities and tips on how to explore the outdoors with toddlers.

Supporting Stories:

Up in the Garden and Down in the Dirt by Kate Messner

Under Ground by Denise Fleming