
Look Around and Celebrate Fall with Activities for Young Children

By Sherri Meyer

Fall is here and is a great time for activities with your child. It is neither too hot, nor too cold for outdoor activities. October is a busy month with pumpkins, changes in the weather and changes in leaves. The activities that follow are great for autumn gatherings with friends and families who also have young children. The activities are designed for children to experience a variety of materials and opportunities. Enjoy the season and the time spent together!

Visit a Farm

This time of the year, farms and orchards are full of learning experiences. Animals have had their young and children can learn the different names of the animals (cow for the female, bull for the male, and calf for the baby) and will be able to compare sizes and colors as well. Farms and orchards also have wonderful fruits to taste and purchase. Have a tasting party! Apples are great to use in cooking, but they're also excellent sources of conversation. Talk to children about the different colors of apples and how they each taste.



“Decorate” a Pumpkin

Some families want to set out a pumpkin on their front steps to celebrate the season of autumn. After a pumpkin has been cut into it does not last for much longer than a week so an alternative to carving a pumpkin is to decorate it. Ask your child to think about how they want their pumpkin to look. This helps your child to develop a plan and then to work on carrying that plan out. Plans do change, so if your child changes their mind, that's OK! Children can draw their design on paper first to make the plan. Do not worry if the plan is not followed; after all, the pumpkin experience is for the child. Use paints that are non-toxic and allow even the youngest child to paint the pumpkin. Using washable paint makes cleanup easier; however, you will want to be sure the pumpkin is kept out of the rain so the decorations will last. Search your home for hats, scarves, and other items to use for decorating the pumpkin. Have fun and let your child's imagination run free. Remember to let the child do the work!

Carve a Pumpkin

Some families may enjoy the experience of actually carving a pumpkin. Caution should be taken since a knife is needed to cut through the pumpkin. Since families will not want young children close by when actually cutting, provide your child the opportunity to draw the face for the pumpkin. After opening the pumpkin top, allow your child to assist in pulling out the insides of the pumpkin, noticing the texture of the seeds, the texture of

the inside walls of the pumpkin, and how it feels on their hands. You may want to bake the seeds and eat them after cooling. It is a great time to expose children to a food they may not have eaten before. Please NOTE: It is not recommended that children under the age of three eat seeds or nuts due to choking hazards.

Make a Pumpkin Pie

Making a pumpkin pie is not difficult and can be great fun. Children learn a variety of skills such as measuring and counting (“We need a full can of pumpkin, we need 1 teaspoon of cinnamon, we need two eggs”, etc.). Children will also learn about changes. The mixture will look different from the time the ingredients are put into the bowl and then after they are mixed. Allow your child to stir the mixture. This is great for small muscle development in the hands. Be cautious of the hot stove and never allow children to play around or near it while it is heating and cooking.

Compare Sizes of Pumpkins

While at the grocery or the pumpkin patch, talk with your child about the different sizes and shapes of the pumpkins. This allows your child the opportunity to make comparisons and sort by size. Even the youngest child can point to the “big pumpkin”. It is a beginning to building math skills.

Notice Changes of Leaves

All families travel at some time in their day. As you drive or walk your child to child care, school, or other activities, take a few minutes to notice the changes that are occurring in our environment. Talk about the different colors of leaves that you see. Notice the change that occurs over time from the beginning of the week to the end of the week. Remember that infants need to hear language as much as older children. Leaves are great items to talk to infants about.



Rake Leaves

Raking leaves is a fun activity (hard work for the adult but fun for all). It is a great activity that does not require any special planning or equipment. Leaves have to be raked anyway so why not have fun while you do it. Not only can you rake the leaves, but if child sized rakes are available, your child can assist as well. Rake a big pile and then allow your child to experience how much fun it is to run and jump in them. Be a kid yourself and

have fun jumping in the pile of leaves with your child. Children experience physical activity and the importance of fun from their families.

While you are outside and raking leaves, take a few minutes to gather some leaves that have fallen to the ground. Encourage your child to talk about the variety of colors they observe and sort the leaves by colors or size. Make different piles and compare to see which has more or less.



Books

Visit your local library for books that talk about fall or autumn. Read to your child every day! Reading and understanding the spoken word will be intertwined in all that your child is involved in as a young child and later as an elementary age child.

These are just a few activities that can be enjoyed during the Fall. Many of them can be adapted for a variety of ages from toddlers to school agers. Enjoy the season – it will be over before you know it!

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