



Nature Play: Nature Mandalas

Making Nature Mandalas with Children

Mandala is taken from the Sanskrit word for circle. In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition a mandala is a representation of the universe. In nature play, a mandala can be an exploration of materials, patterns, and creativity. The process to make a mandala can be as simple or complex as you want it to be, and in the context of exploring creativity, there is no wrong way to do it. Traditionally mandalas are circular and symmetrical, and, importantly temporary. They are generally made by starting from the center and working out to the edges.

Motivating Questions: What repeating patterns do we see in nature? How can we make repeating patterns out of these materials? What should we put in the center? What would you put next? Do we have enough to make it go all the way around? What color or texture is next?

NOTE for Grownups: it is fun to do these activities with your children, but remember when they (not you) lead the activity they learn problem-solving skills and gain confidence.

Materials: Natural materials collected from your yard or a walk through your neighborhood (sticks, leaves, pinecones and other seed pods, tree bark, shells, etc.). A quiet place.

Directions

1. Gather your materials. It can be fun to take a bucket on a walk and collect items you find, such as sticks, leaves, rocks, etc. Notice things that are symmetrical, unusual, recurring, or unique.
2. Start your mandala. Pick an item to be the center of your mandala. Often these are large or unique things, something distinctive.
3. Pick your next set of items (sticks, shells, stones, leaves, or a combination of items) and arrange them in a circle around your center object.
4. Continue to add more layers/circles to your pattern. Several layers are needed to have a strong visual effect and it can often be helpful to define an outer boundary to help children stay within a given area, by creating a circle on the ground with a hula hoop, chalk, or other natural border. It is also okay to let the child explore beyond the traditional circular shape and just explore patterns.
5. When you're finished, take a picture of your mandala. Mandalas are intended to be temporary. A picture helps to preserve the memory and share it with others. Pictures also allow everyone to revisit ideas and talk about their work later.
6. It can be fun to explore images of mandalas with children online as well

Online resources for making mandalas with children

<https://www.mothersing.com/articles/creating-nature-mandalas-children/>
<https://www.playfullearning.net/resource/making-mandala-art-with-kids/>
<http://runwildmychild.com/making-mandalas/>
<https://artfulparent.com/mandalas-in-nature-mandala-art/>



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Mandala Examples from the Web

