

## Keeping Kids Busy in the Summer Time

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### Homemade Ice Cream in a Bag

Milk can become homemade ice cream in five minutes by using a bag! This homemade, creamy treat is a summertime delight for kids and adults alike.

#### What you'll need:

- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1/2 cup milk or half & half
- 1/4 teaspoon vanilla
- 6 tablespoons rock salt
- 1 pint-size plastic food storage bag (e.g., Ziploc)
- 1 gallon-size plastic food storage bag
- Ice cubes

#### How to make it:

1. Fill the large bag half full of ice, and add the rock salt. Seal the bag.
2. Put milk, vanilla, and sugar into the small bag, and seal it.
3. Place the small bag inside the large one, and seal it again carefully.
4. Shake until the mixture is ice cream, which takes about 5 minutes.
5. Wipe off the top of the small bag, then open it carefully. Enjoy!

#### Tips:

A 1/2 cup milk will make about 1 scoop of ice cream, so double the recipe if you want more. But don't increase the proportions more than that -- a large amount might be too big for kids to pick-up because the ice itself is heavy.

## Tips for Teaching Kids to Cook

Let's face it: as adults, we're usually cooking because we have to. But to a child, a kitchen is a mad scientist's laboratory. Stuff gets measured and mixed; liquids are poured into beakers; ordinary substances are transformed, as if by magic, into delicious edible wonders. Isn't it time you took on an apprentice or two? A few simple tricks can make it easy and safe for your kids to help you in the kitchen.

- **Give them a birds-eye view.** Provide each child with a stable step-stool, just high enough to allow them to safely reach the counter or table. Even if there isn't actually anything for them to do, they'll still enjoy watching you cook and it's a great opportunity to chat.
- **Dress for the job.** The right outfit makes all the difference. A kid-sized apron, a mini chef's hat or just one of dad's big old shirts will help keep clothes clean and get your little assistant into the cooking mood.
- **Get everyone helping.** Assign cooking tasks to your kids depending on age, ability and level of experience in the kitchen. Even a toddler can help wash vegetables and tear the ingredients for salads. Three- or four-year-olds can help mix ingredients in a bowl, form the dough for cookies by hand or roll meatballs. Five- to seven-year olds are usually able to measure ingredients, cut veggies and cheese with a blunt knife or even locate ingredients by reading the labels. And children eight years old and up are generally capable of using a microwave or oven with supervision, peeling and cutting up vegetables, shredding cheese and preparing kid-friendly recipes (below) almost entirely by themselves.
- **Offer some tools.** Give your child his or her very own set of measuring cups and spoons. Brightly coloured plastic utensils make it fun to measure and mix ingredients. If you have more than one child, make sure each one has a different colour to avoid squabbles.
- **Think small – really small.** While you're busy making a family-sized macaroni and cheese casserole, let your child spoon some of the mixture into a tiny baking dish, just for his own personal self. Invest in a miniature muffin pan so your child can make little baby muffins, or pick up a mini loaf pan in which to bake a kid-sized banana bread. Everyone knows that tiny food is just more fun to make and eat.
- **When in doubt, skewer it!** Kids love food on a stick. It's fun to make, fun to eat and looks really cool. Even your littlest cook can spear cubes of cheese, cherry tomatoes or chunks of ham on a bamboo skewer. Arrange them on a plate with a puddle of dipping sauce (try Dijon mustard and mayo or creamy Italian dressing) and voila, appetizers are served.
- **And finally – keep your sense of humor!** Spilled some milk? Dropped an egg? It's all part of the process. After all, cleaning up can be fun too!

## **Play in the Dirt!**

Summer just wouldn't be summer without kids mucking about in the dirt. This year, let kids loose for some old-fashioned fun. Better yet, throw on an old T-shirt and shorts and get knee-deep in it with them! (Just keep a supply of soap and water handy for the after-effects.)

### **Grow and nurture in the Garden**

Most kids love to garden, especially when worms, weeds and water are involved. Pull out a pair of kid-sized gloves and let them have free rein over a dirt patch. Encourage them to look for bugs, worms, frogs and to make the unthinkable – mud pies!

### **Dig for Buried Treasure**

To start, go through your house and gather some trinkets or toys you don't mind burying. Next, put together a treasure-finding toolkit that includes a hand shovel, an old paintbrush (to clean off unearthed treasures), Ziploc bags (to contain what they find) and a map showing where kids should start their search. Then either bury the treasures in your garden (placing them in an area without plants is a good idea) or in a large bucket filled with dirt in your backyard. Give the kids their toolkits and watch them scavenge for treasures! For an extra bit of fun, have kids label their finds with made-up names and place them in a "museum" (or on a serving platter) to share with visitors.

### **Soil Surveyors**

Play scientist with your little ones in this fun activity. Fill a box with soil from your garden (clear boxes or food containers are great if you have them but cardboard works well, too), making sure the soil is moist. Have your kids search the yard and garden for pebbles and small plants or weeds and place them inside. Then have them draw a picture of what the box and its contents look like from above. Leave the box outside for a day or two and come back with the picture to compare how things have changed. If there aren't many differences on the surface, have kids root through the soil to see if any snails, ants or worms have made an appearance.

### **Build a Soil Castle**

Forget drawing castles – encourage your kids to make one! Grab old margarine and yogurt containers and use them to mold soil from the garden into their own version of a sand castle. Make sure the dirt is moist but not overly wet (though you can always add more dirt if it gets too runny) and use leaves, sticks and rocks to add windows, doors, flags etc.

## **Backyard Games for Kids**

We all know kids are little creative geniuses, always busy making up their own games to satisfy their roaming imaginations and busy natures. Still, they could use some ideas once in a while. Here are some backyard games you can set up this summer.

### **Bean Bag Toss**

Make an easy Bean Bag Toss using a double layer of poster board glued together and a large box. Use the large box as a base, and attach the poster board to one side of it. Before attaching the poster board, paint a design on it, allowing for one or more holes. We never kept score, but the kids had a lot of fun throwing those bean bags. They're easy to make from fabric scraps if you sew. Get the kids to help.

### **Scavenger Hunt**

Hide items in yard and have the kids try to find them. This can be as easy or elaborate as you chose. Rather than encouraging competitiveness, have the children work together to find all the items.

### **Duck, Duck, Goose**

Don't forget this classic although you need at least five friends to make this game a lot of fun. Sit in a circle and have one child walk around patting each child on the head saying, "Duck, duck, duck" and finally "goose." The child deemed "goose" stands up and runs around the circle in the opposite direction from the other child. Whoever gets back to the spot and sits down first wins the spot and the other child starts again with the "Duck, duck, goose."

### **Simon Says**

An oldie but a goodie. If your child has a favorite character, substitute "Simon" with a character from the theme. Children should listen carefully and only do what "Simon" says.

### **Charades**

Give a child the theme or group of animals then have them act out what the animal does. You and the kids can try to guess the name of the animal.

### **Freeze Tag**

One child is chosen as being "it." The chosen child tags the other children by catching up to them and touching them. Once tagged, the child must remain frozen until another free child goes through their legs. When all the children are frozen (except the one who was chosen as being "it") with no one to set them free the game is over and you can start again.

### **Balloon Bust Relay**

Purchase large balloons, stuff with a prize such as a whistle, then inflate and tie. You will need one balloon for player. Divide children into two teams and place each team behind the start line. At the other end of the room are the balloons. On your mark a child from each team runs to the other end of the room, grabs a balloon and sits on it, bounces on it, lays on it, anything they can do to make it pop.

When the balloon pops they collect their prize and run back to their teammates. The game continues until every child has retrieved their prize. If one team falls behind parents are allowed to help. Make sure you've got the movie camera rolling; you won't want to miss the action or the expressions. If you don't have time for a relay yell, "GO" and let every child grab a balloon at the same time and try to pop it. Make sure to carefully clean up the balloon remains, as they are choke hazards for young children.

### **Wits and Consequences**

Blow up balloons with questions, written on strips of paper, inside and place balloons in Bag "A". Let each guest reach in and pull out a balloon on their turn. If they answer correctly they stay in the game for another 'round, if they answer incorrectly they pull a balloon out of Bag "B", pop it and have to do what it says..."Rub your tummy and pat your head at the same time", "Strut and cluck like a chicken three times". If they complete their task they can return to the game. If not they can cheer on the remaining players. When all the questions have been answered the games over. Make sure to carefully clean up the balloon remains, as they are choke hazards for young children..