

Treehouse in the Park

Outdoor Learning Spaces

Outdoor learning spaces offer so many possibilities to children not offered in indoor learning environments. Play spaces that include sand, grass, rocks, trees, mud, water and other natural elements encourage open-ended interactions, gross-motor skills, risky play, discovery and exploration. Playing in the outdoors is also vital for a child to establish a connection with and appreciation for nature.



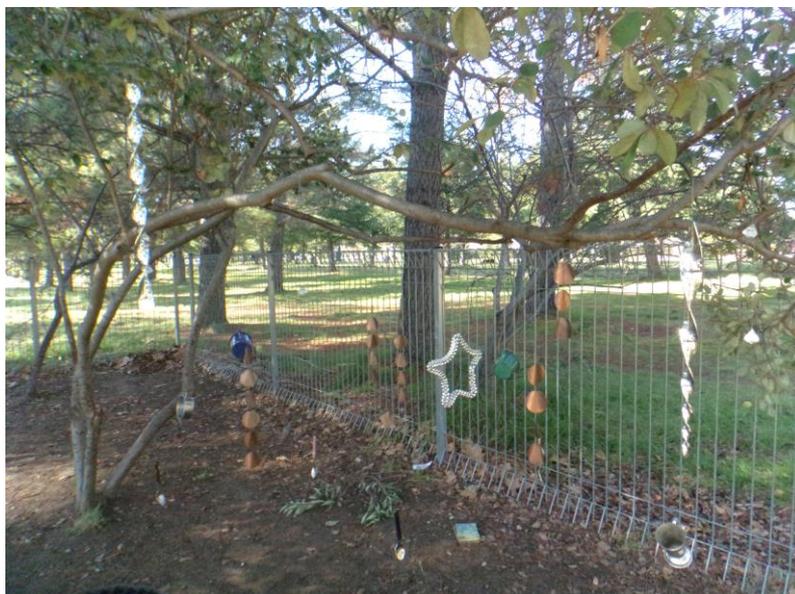
We are extremely lucky at Treehouse in the Park to have a beautiful outdoor environment, with a wide variety of natural elements for the children to explore and discover. Our location in the park is also an ideal environment for outdoor exploration, and we often take the children on nature walks of our local area. Over the past few months we have been making a few changes to our natural environment to further enhance the learning opportunities for the children of Treehouse. Our outdoor learning environment was once one large, open space and was lacking smaller, more secluded areas for play. Our outdoor learning environment now features the following play spaces:

Outdoor Kitchen:

Located towards the back of the yard next to the shed, the outdoor kitchen is the newest addition to our outdoor environment. Made from recycled palettes, the outdoor kitchen is a wonderful example of repurposing. Smaller, more secluded areas encourage play with others, and the outdoor kitchen is a perfect location for imaginative play. Stocked up with old pots and pans, the kitchen has been extremely



popular with the children and they are often seen incorporating elements of nature into their kitchen play, using rocks, sand and dirt from around the yard as part of their imaginative play.



The Music Tree:

Based on the story *The Music Tree* written by Catriona Hoy, the music tree is another example of recycling and repurposing in the Treehouse yard. A selection of old pots, pans, cutlery and various metal objects from charity stores were hung from a tree in the forest using fishing line. In

the story *The Music Tree*, a mother hangs various noisy objects from a tree to provide an outlet for her son to make noise and music freely instead of making noise inside the house.

The Treehouse music tree is a space for children to make music in a less traditional sense, given there are no musical instruments. The children were involved in the process of helping to hang the objects in the tree and chose what to hang and where. This gave them a sense of ownership over the tree: it is *their* space in *their* environment.

The children were quite curious whilst we were making the Music Tree and we were often met with the question “*why are you hanging pots and spoons in the tree?*” After the objects were hung in the tree the educators began to model how to use the tree, using the spoons to hit the objects creating music. The children began to mirror this behavior and began to make their own music in the tree. The children have even begun to approach educators with objects they have found around the yard and asking if they can be hung in the tree.

Even when there are no children using the Music Tree and the wind picks up, the objects clang together making some beautiful background music for our outdoor play.

The Forest:

The “forest” is what the children of Treehouse have affectionately named the secluded space at the back of our yard. The forest is one of the most versatile play spaces at Treehouse and provides endless opportunities for imaginative play. At Treehouse the children often engage in risky play and climbing trees in the forest is a great example of this. Many of the children have

‘Outdoor learning environments support all aspects of children’s learning and invite conversations between children, early childhood educators, families and the broader community. They promote opportunities for sustained shared learning and collaborative thinking.’
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sbecome quite skilled climbers, navigating their way up the tree with confidence and skill. Recently, the children and educators have been working together to do some digging in the forest. Fortunately, the dirt is incredibly soft and easy for the children to

dig up using metal shovels. What was originally a small hole in the ground is now a huge trench and is getting bigger by the day! Metal shovels and wheel barrows are set up in the mornings near the trench just in case the children decide to do some more work on the trench and this activity has been occupying them for hours on end. All the dirt dug up from the forest has been shoveled into wheelbarrows and unloaded onto 'the hill'- another area in our outdoor learning environment.

The Hill

The hill is another small, secluded space with unlimited uses. Surrounded by trees, the hill is a quiet, private space for children to engage in imaginative play. As pictured below, Kitty and Hana recently transformed the tree on the hill into a car to drive all the way to Melbourne! As we have been moving dirt from the forest onto the hill, there is now another space for children to dig with shovels and diggers.



This is only the beginning for our outdoor learning environment. We aim to create even more engaging learning spaces in our outdoor environment over the coming months!

