



tinkergarten®

AT HOME

WEEK OF MAY 4

This Week's Focus: Setting Up Spaces to Invite Play



This week, set up a space in your yard or in your home that naturally invites kids to play. The environment we create for our kids goes a long way in inspiring and extending children's playful learning. And, there are really easy ways to use the objects we already have to transform a corner of our home into a world for play.

Getting Started

Gather related objects in your home or yard and set them up to create the space to inspire play. We've included descriptions and photos to help you bring ideas to life. You know your kids and your spaces best, so please invent and adjust as needed!



We share a bit of insight about each age group and suggest a few ways to set up a space to inspire the kind of exploration and playful learning that is typical during that stage. Many Tinkergarten ideas can be enjoyed at all ages, so please feel free to draw from any of these ideas as you create unique spaces to spark play and learning this week—especially if you have siblings to support!

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Babies/Toddlers—Space to Discover

Babies and toddlers are learning about their own bodies and the world around them, largely by interacting with the objects in their environment. They learn about the properties of objects by holding them, banging them, moving them, and even tasting them. To support these important early discoveries, here are a few ways to set up your play space this week!



Simplicity
is key!

A soft
surface and a
few well-curated
objects are all that
is needed for rich
and sustained
play time.



Exploration Space!

- **Starter objects**

Soft blanket; pillowcase; metal bowl; small, mouthable objects

- **How to invite kids to play**

- Hide fun objects behind and under things and then reveal them.
- Offer objects that, when banged on or banged together, make different sounds.
- Put things into different containers & play with taking lids on & off.

- **Objects you can add in over time**

Containers with tops (bins, bowls, boxes); wooden spoons; measuring cups; nature treasures (pine cones, flowers, rocks); water



Preschoolers—Space to Pretend

Preschool years are prime time for pretend play. During the preschool years, kiddos move from the simple understanding that you can use an object in different ways to being able to plan and carry through whole pretend play stories. During preschool years, kids enjoy dressing up and reenacting play scenarios or themes that are familiar to them from day to day life or stories that they love.



Bakery
play inside
and
outside!

Many
of the same
materials used in
both scenarios (with
the addition of mud
pies & tree cookies
at the outdoor
location!)



Bakery Space!

- **Starter objects**

Cookie sheet, muffin tin or cake pan; mixing spoon; measuring cups; pretend ingredients (play dough, paper, dried beans, mud, leaves, rocks, nature treasures)

- **How to invite kids to play**

- “What a great spot for a bakery! What kind of things could you make here?”
- Walk into the space as a customer and order something.

- **Objects you can add in over time**

More kitchen stuff (spatula, cookie cutters, whisk, rolling pin); small containers for packaging finished goods; decorations (small nature treasures, beads, pom poms); tin foil, cupcake wrappers; bakery sign, menu, etc.



School Age Kids—Space to Create

As children age into the “school years” they form strong attachments to special places, and move from following a familiar narrative to creating narratives all their own. Fantasy takes off, and stories and pretend games become more elaborate, imaginative and often involve other friends, both real and imaginary. Children at this age are also more apt to create a space they can return to it again and again.



If you don't have a kid tool bench, check out the cardboard version. A cardboard box, tape, some pipe cleaners, a few tools and...
voila!



Maker (or Fix-It) Space!

- **Starter objects:**

Recycled cardboard boxes, tubes, or other containers; rubber bands, twine, screws, clips (or the other stuff you have in ‘that’ drawer); glue, tape, sticks, stones, acorns and other nature treasures.

- **What to say or do to invite kids in**

- “I wonder what these objects might become if we attached them together?”
- “I’m looking for a machine that can (fill in the blank). Can you make that here?”

- **Objects you can add in over time**

- Sewing kit supplies (buttons, zippers, thread, fabric scraps); sticks, stones and other nature treasures; any broken or waiting-to-be-recycled electronics; tools you feel comfortable having kid use on their own; toy building materials (LEGO, Tinkertoys, etc.)



Additional Play Space Ideas



Preschoolers

Grocery store Recycled food boxes/cans/bottles, something with wheels or a basket for a cart, materials for sign and label making.

Spaceship Boxes/a big log outside, paint or markers, colored paper, “helmet” making materials, whatever “outfit” says space travel to your kiddo.

Birds Nest Plenty of sticks, cloth, ribbons, yarn or bits of whatever you can gather. Form a circle-ish shape with kids, then let the bird play fly. See full steps [here](#).



School Age Kids

A performance venue Disassembled boxes, tablecloth or sheet, flashlight, branches, costumes.

A woodland survival den Leave this one to kids! Ask, “What could you grab from the house to make a shelter to survive for 3 days outside...or under the dining room table?”

A time machine A big box (or closet space), recycled egg cartons/tubes/bottles, acorns/ buttons/beads for control panel.

Literacy Connections

This week we are sharing one of our favorite books that is all about creating amazing pretend spaces to play... and drawing your way through them! [Here](#) is Tinkergarten parent (and husband to Tinkergarten’s Head of Leader Learning, Casie Smith) Joe Debiec, reading *Harold and the Purple Crayon* by Crockett Johnson.

Share Your Experiences!

Join us LIVE on Tuesday, May 5th on the [Tinkergarten Facebook page](#). Share photos and stories of your experiences and time outside this week using #tinkergarten and #outdoorsall4. Share in our free [#OutdoorsAll4 Facebook group](#), and we may just feature your photos in next week’s email!

About Tinkergarten

Tinkergarten® is your guide to purposeful outdoor play—the kind of play that helps kids become healthy, capable and confident learners.