



## Section 6

### Embedding care for our outdoor spaces into our experiences

#### 6.4 Digging







##### Why digging matters

Children benefit from the opportunity to dig in soil. It is a place of imagination, physical labour and treasure to be found. It is also a time to wonder about things which cannot easily be seen such as what is beneath our feet in the spaces that we play.

##### Building upon prior learning

When children show an interest in digging you can take the opportunity to decide together on a suitable spot. This is a sensible precaution to prevent lots of holes being dug all over your site and creating trip hazards.

Let's see if we can find a place to dig that...

-  Is far enough away from trees, as digging can damage their roots.
-  Is large enough for a group to safely dig together.
-  We can dig! The ground isn't too hard.
-  Has space around the patch that enables us to enter and leave without causing the surrounding ground to suffer. Do we need to put down matting to prevent wear and tear? Who can best advise us?
-  Works well with other nearby areas such as gardening where the tools can be shared.
-  Is there anywhere we need to avoid digging?

##### Reflective thoughts

- Is digging an only physical act or is it a context for other types of play? How can we facilitate this?
- Do staff and children understand where is okay to dig and why?
- How do we enable and broaden connections to be made between children's digging play and other aspects of our nursery and community lives? For example, linking to gardening, farming, building and excavations and animal life?

##### Creating a digging space

- There are underground pipes, cables and drainage in some outdoor spaces which must not be disturbed. Know what's under the ground and where. Check the utility map of the outdoor space and consult your landowner, if necessary.
- Sometimes the earth is too compacted and will need breaking up in advance. It may be possible to add sandy loam soil to the loose soil to make digging easier, if the soil is clay-rich.
- If digging down isn't possible, because of asphalt or the ground is too hard, then a large raised bed can enable digging to happen – big enough for a group of children to physically get into and dig. Go for a depth of at least 500mm for a satisfying digging experience.
- Having a source of water nearby can add to the discovery and experimentation as well as meeting children's desires to transport and mix materials.



## Section 6

### Embedding care for our outdoor spaces into our experiences

- In public spaces, refill child-made holes before leaving the site and replace the turf or ground cover to ensure the place is left as you found it. Fill in holes made at beaches too.

#### Following children's curiosities

This could involve conversations with children that include wondering about:

- 🗨 Have you noticed any changes in the soil as you dig down?
- 🗨 What treasures can be found in our soil? Who has lived here before us and what secrets does the earth hold about the past?
- 🗨 How can we care for the worms and other creatures that we find in our digging area?
- 🗨 What other creatures dig holes and why? Does a mole have a different way of digging to that of a badger?
- 🗨 What does our soil feel and smell like? It should have a fresh "earthy" smell. Does it need a rest from being dug and trodden upon?
- 🗨 Can we help keep our soil healthy by giving it what it needs?

#### Caring for your digging tools

- Using real tools for digging is more satisfying and it's possible to buy high quality small tools for this purpose and for gardening.
- We need to look after our spades, forks and other digging tools. They need to be wiped down after use and stored in a dry place. It's not safe to leave them lying around.
- Have storage nearby and help your children learn to return them immediately after using.

#### We care for soil by

- Gardening organically. This means without using artificial fertilisers and pesticides. This is safer and healthier for children as well as soil biodiversity.
- Composting (natural organic matter) and adding this to our gardening areas.
- Planting trees and shrubs to reduce erosion.
- Knowing that in parks and botanic gardens we do not go on the brown soil beds as plants are growing there.
- Being aware of the value of peat.