

INEXPENSIVE PLAY IDEAS FOR CHILDREN



We are all aware of the pressure put on parents by toy manufacturers at this time of year. We are all conned into feeling there are certain toys we've got to provide and how you feel children are missing out if they don't get them. Many of us become overwhelmed at Christmas time by the desire to "do right" by our children and provide them with the best. However, to help escape the credit crunch, there are alternative play opportunities that you can offer your children that will not break the bank and will give them just as much enjoyment and satisfaction. Sometimes the most special gifts do not necessarily come with a hefty price tag. Children need toys that help them learn. They need toys that encourage them to imagine and explore, not the latest gadgets advertised on the television. The toys they need can be simple, will last a long time and do not use batteries. As a parent you must have watched your child unwrap some fantastic present only to see it discarded 10 minutes later in favour of the cardboard box it came in.

Here are some examples of great inexpensive toys and activities which will make excellent Christmas presents or will provide hours of fun over the Christmas holidays. With all the activities listed below, try to resist the temptation to intervene or lead what your children are doing. Let them take the lead and the initiative. They'll enjoy the experience so much more and it will help them develop their own creativity, team-building and problem-solving skills. At the same time, do keep an eye obviously to ensure there are no accidents!

Treasure Basket

A Treasure Basket is a shallow sturdy basket containing a collection of everyday objects chosen to stimulate the different senses for babies who cannot move independently. The purpose of the treasure basket is to maximise interest through the use of the five senses: touch, sight, sound, smell and taste. The babies gain rich sensory experiences through looking, touching, banging, licking, picking up and dropping the various items. The idea of playing with everyday objects is not a new one. Most people will remember playing with pots and pans in the kitchen or sorting through the button box. Providing babies with a treasure basket gives them the opportunity to explore and discover things for themselves by themselves.

Suggested contents for a treasure basket

Wooden Objects

Wooden curtain rings, napkin rings, castanets, egg cup, spoon, spatula, pegs, rolling pin, honey dipper, cotton reels.

Metal Objects

Spoons, measuring spoons, bunch of keys, bath plug and chain, garlic press, small egg whisk, small tins containing rice, shells etc, bunch of bells, tin lids, metal egg cup, bottle brush, tea strainer, brass curtain rings, lengths of fine chain.

Natural Objects/Materials

Large pebbles, paint brush, small natural sponge, a lemon, woollen ball, little baskets, shells, wooden brush, driftwood, toothbrush, shaving brush, pumice stone, avocado pear stone, natural loofah, fir cones of different sizes, feathers, corks, small shoe brush.

Leather/Rubber/Textiles

Wallet/purse, glasses case, coloured ribbons, powder puff, fabric cut offs, bean bag, fur ball, rubber tubing, tennis ball, golf ball, teddy bear, door stop, slip mat

Paper/Cardboard/Other

Greaseproof paper, small cardboard boxes, tin foil, hair rollers, pan scourer make up brushes, things that rattle, things that fit inside one another, velvet hair bands and scrunchies, scent bags, sturdy cardboard tubes.

How to use the treasure basket

When using treasure baskets parents need to find a quiet area where their child can sit comfortably. Set the basket near the child so he/she can reach the objects easily. The parent should sit close enough to the child to supervise but not so close that they interfere. Parents should not interrupt their child's thought process unless the child clearly needs attention.

Wonder Box

Wonder Boxes are an excellent low-cost way for parents to engage children in play. They allow children to sort, explore textures, sounds and actions. It will encourage interaction which may be initiated by the child or the parent. Wonder Boxes are normally theme based and can come in different forms e.g. suitcases, baskets, handbags, hat boxes, draw string bags, empty bean bags, plastic containers etc.

Examples of themes that could be used:

Holidays, natural materials, dressing up, seasons, senses, stories, nursery rhymes, music & dance, rolling, colours, counting, alphabet, sorting, sequencing and stacking.

Using a Wonder Box

Wonder Boxes should be placed in a quiet area where children can explore the contents freely. Parents can use the Wonder boxes for story time with their child. The child can talk about, describe, explore and investigate the various materials which promotes thinking skills and awakens their curiosity.

Treasure Chest

This is an excellent personalised gift which contains items of specific interest for individual children.

Things you'll need:

- Shoe Box
- Tissue paper
- Paint or Construction paper to decorate your box
- Tape, Glue, Scissors

Ideas for items to fill the treasure chest

- Child's favourite
- Sweets
- Small notebook
- Pencils
- Pens
- Funny pictures
- Little toys
- Story book
- Photographs
- Include little things that the child likes

You can paint and decorate the shoe box in the child's favourite colours or make it like a pirate's chest or dolls house.

Indoor Sandbox

Fill a large washing-up bowl or well-sealed cardboard box (without the lid) with a mixture of lentils, rice and/or cous cous. Provide spoons, sieves, measuring jugs, plastic funnels and ladles. Great for toddlers and pre-school children.

Outdoor Dens

For older children, you may wish to help them nail together a few sturdy sticks to form the framework for a den if your garden or backyard doesn't have any features which provide a natural den. Search out unwanted tyres from bike shops or garages, plastic crates from milkmen, old sheets, curtains, pieces of sturdy polythene etc. Tables and chairs may also help to provide a frame.

Indoor Dens

Indoor dens are even easier. Let your children move the furniture around as they wish and provide sheets, towels and/or duvets to drape over it. Rugs, cushions and pillows will make the den more homely. The den may become a castle, a ship, a rocket – let them use their imaginations!

Junk Art

All sorts of natural and everyday objects can be put to good use as materials for junk art. Try paper plates, plastic containers, twigs, used match sticks, egg boxes. Provide paints, felt-tips, crayons and glitter so your children can decorate their artworks.

Musical Kitchen

Younger children will love the opportunity to take all the pans and lids out of the cupboard and bang them with spoons. Let them experiment with the different noises made by big and small pans, spoons of different sizes etc.

Cardboard Boxes

Given the chance, children will turn these into all sorts of things – a pirate ship, a shop, a puppet theatre – you name it! Let them paint and decorate their creation if they wish.

Floating and Sinking

Fill a large container with water and place at a safe level where all children can take part in the activity. Ask the children to go around the house and choose various small objects (nothing of value) e.g. small tubs, beads, pasta, plastic bricks, balls etc. Ask the children put each item in the water and guess whether it will float or sink. Ask the children questions about why they think the items float and sink and explain the reasons for this.

Hunt with the Magnet

Fill a shallow tray with sand and fill it with magnetic objects. Give each child a small magnet and explain to them that you have hidden objects in the sand. Encourage the children to take turns at finding an object using only the magnet. The deeper the sand the more difficult the activity.

Minibeasts Hunt

Give each child a magnifying glass and take them out into the garden to explore and look for mini-beasts. Discuss the mini beasts that they find regarding where they live and what they eat. Continue this activity indoors by reading stories and looking at pictures of different minibeasts.

Musical Jars

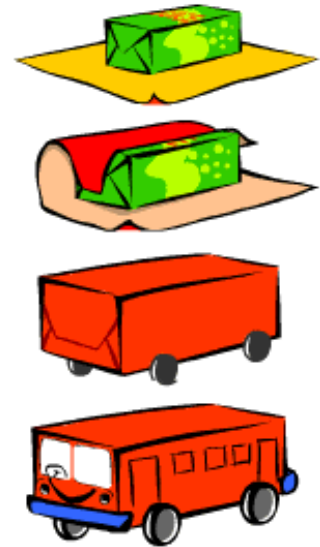
Fill some clear glass jars with water and add different colours of food colouring. Label each jar with a number e.g. 1 – 10. Using a wooden spoon to beat the jars gently and write down the numbers that make up well known nursery rhymes such as Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star. Let the children experiment with the jars to make their own tunes.

A Bus of Your Own

Shiny vehicles on a shop shelf are inviting, but how about making a shiny red bus, much like the ones you see on the roads. What's more, you can give a new life to things that are being readied for the dustbin at this very instant!

The things you need:

1. Empty juice carton
2. Felt paper (any colour of your choice)
3. Black marker pen or pen
4. Four bottle caps
5. Glue
6. Cardboard



Step 1: Paint the four bottle caps to make the wheels for your bus.

Step 2: Cut the felt paper to cover the entire outer part of the juice carton. Stick the paper with glue.

Step 3: Now, using the marker, draw the details of a bus - windows, door, windshield, etc. Give your bus the design you want!

Step 4: Attach the four 'wheels' on both sides of the carton, using glue.

Step 5: To make a bumper, take a strip of cardboard, painted black around 1 cm wide, and measure its length according to the width of the front portion of the bus. Colour it and stick it in front.

You are now the proud owner of a bus!

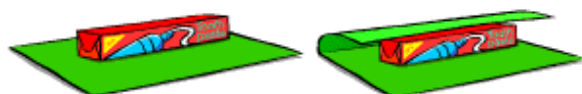
Making Music

If you are interested in making music, why not start by making a music instrument from things easily available at home?



The things you need:

1. An empty toothpaste pack
2. Three rubber bands
3. A sheet of coloured paper
4. Glue
5. A blade or paper cutter



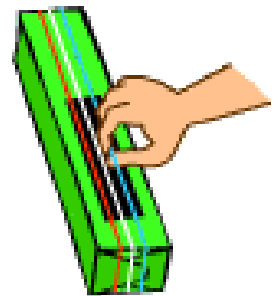
Step 1: Cover the entire pack with a coloured paper. Use glue to stick the paper.

Step 2: Draw a rectangle of 1 inch x 2 inches on the upper side of the pack. The rectangle should be in the middle of the pack.

Step 3: Cut out this rectangle with a blade or a paper cutter.



Step 4: Take the rubber bands and place them around the pack, along the length. They are the strings of your musical instrument. Pluck the strings and hear the sound! Also decorate the instrument the way you want to.



Your tango is ready to be played. The rectangular hollow in the middle of the instrument will ensure that any sound you create by plucking the strings, will enhance the sound. Now all you have to do is get ready with a song. And let the music say the rest!

Shaker

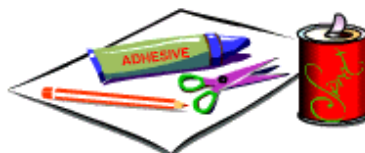
Do you want to belt out a song, but need an instrument that will keep the rhythm and add to the effect? Why don't you try making a 'shaker' that will do the trick?

Just remember, you will be making a valuable addition to the range of percussion instruments that are used for their rhythm and the texture of their sound - like the maraca (a rattle like instrument in the shape of a gourd, that contains dried seeds, pebbles or lead shots).

So what are you waiting for!

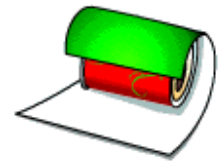
The things you need:

1. An empty soft drink can
2. A few pebbles
3. Coloured paper
4. Marker



Step 1: Put the pebbles inside the can.

Step 2: Cover the opening of the can by sticking a piece of chart paper across it.



Step 3: Take coloured paper of a size that is enough to cover the entire can. Stick it over the can with glue.

Step 4: Decorate the can the way you want to. You can draw flowers, cartoons, faces or whatever catches your fancy.

Try your hand at making shakers of different types. With paper plates, for instance. Place pebbles in a paper plate. Cover this with another plate. Now, stick them together with glue. Add decorations with felt pens or markers.

Perhaps you can think of more ideas to make your type of shaker.

Your shakers are ready for the music!



Paper Lanterns

Paper is one thing that can be used for a variety of purposes - crafts, packaging, storage, stationery...the uses are countless. Here is one of the things that you can make.



The things you need:

1. Chart paper
2. Scissors
3. Adhesive

Step 1: Take the chartpaper and cut it into a rectangular piece (12 inches x 6 inches).

Step 2: Fold the paper lengthwise into half.

Step 3: With the help of a scissor make slits all the length from the folded side.



Stick the opposite widths of the paper.

Step 4: Cut a strip (1 inch x 8 inch) from the remaining chart paper. Stick the two ends of the strip to the cylindrical lamp to make the handle. Colour or decorate it the way you like.

The lamp shade is ready to adorn your house. To light the bulb, just extend the electrical wire with a socket to the place where you are going to hang the lamp shade. Fix a bulb and put the switch on.



Green Family

Want to have a family of your own? A green family? All it takes is a little water and sunshine to entice this green family to spread its roots!

The things you need:

1. Empty containers of different sizes
2. Wheat seeds
3. Soil
4. Water
5. Poster colours
6. Brush



Step 1: Fill three-fourths of all the containers with garden soil.



Step 2: Spread a handful of wheat seeds on the soil. Cover the seeds with another layer of soil.

Step 3: Sprinkle some water over the newly sown seeds. Place the pots in a sunny place. Twice a day, spray water generously on the seeds.

It will take 7-14 days for the shoots to appear. After that, spray as much water needed to keep the grass moist.

Once the grass becomes really thick, the 'hair' of each member of the family, is ready. Now it's time to paint faces on the containers.

Step 4: With poster colours and brush, paint the family members' faces on the containers. You can have as many members in this green family as the number of containers!

How big a family do you want? And naming all the family members should be fun, don't you think? So, have your green fingers started itching?



Sock Puppets

Take out those old socks that have been lying in your cupboard. With these puppets you can actually hold a puppet show for your friends and family.

The things you need:

1. Old sock
2. A needle and thread
3. Poster colours
4. Brush
5. Red coloured paper



Step 1: Put your hand inside the sock, take hold of a part of the front of the sock and pull it in. While still holding the front part, turn the sock completely inside out.

Step 2: Use the needle and thread to sew that part of the that you are holding. Now turn the sock out again.



Step 3: The sewn part of the sock forms the mouth of the puppet. You can open and close the mouth with your hand.



Step 4: Cut the red paper in the shape of a tongue and s to the edge of the mouth. Use poster colours to draw eye nose and other facial features above the mouth.



Your puppet is ready. You can introduce your new friend friends.

With your imagination and creativity, you can make lots c



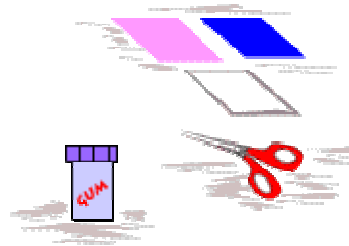
interesting characters for the show. All you need to do now is to comb through your wardrobe for worn and torn socks.

Shape Puzzle

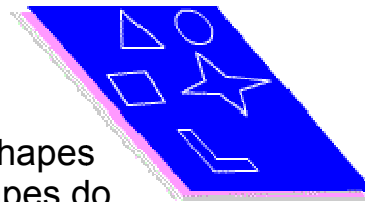
If there is a party in your house then you can make a game yourself and play it with everyone.

The things you need:

1. Coloured paper (Any two colours).
2. Adhesive.
3. Scissors.
4. White card sheet.

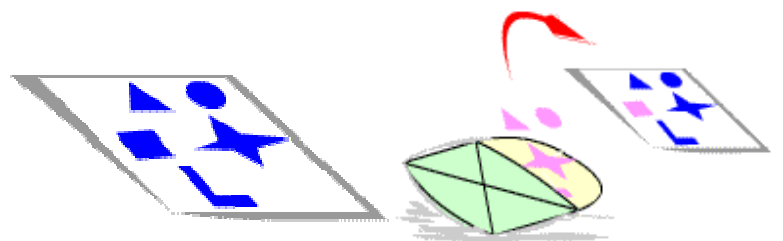


Step 1 Take the two sheets of different colours (blue and pink). Place them on top of each other and cut out at least 15 shapes. You can make any shape: triangle, square, T-shape or even a tree shape. Try to make the shapes as different as possible.



Step 2 Take a white card sheet. Stick all the shapes of one colour (blue) on this sheet. If all the shapes do not fit on one sheet then use another one.

Step 3 Keep the shapes of the other colour (pink) in an envelope.



Now you are ready with the game.

Take out the shapes from the envelope and see how fast you can match them with the shapes on the card sheet. Paste the shapes in order to avoid confusion.

can match them with

Source : www.pitara.com/activities/craft/online

Make your Own Christmas Presents

Potato printing:

You need fabric paint, a cotton surface to print on, potatoes, pastry cutters or a knife and plenty of newspaper.

Cut a potato in half lengthways. Cut a simple shape, such as a fish or star, with a knife, or use biscuit cutters (this way children can cut their own - and with decent results). Dry the potato with kitchen paper. Spread fabric paint on a plate and place the stamp firmly in. Place some old newspaper under the piece of fabric you're printing on, making sure that if you're printing on a bag or T-shirt you place paper between the layers of fabric. Stamp the fabric, pressing down firmly for a few seconds. Wait for the paints to dry thoroughly, then iron on a very hot setting to set the paints and make it washable.

Hot-water-bottle cover:

You will need a hot-water bottle; two contrasting fabrics for the outside; lining fabric - an old pillowcase will do; and wadding.

On a folded piece of paper draw a line 2cm from the edge around your hot-water bottle. When you get to the neck, draw a line straight across. Cut out - you'll have two patterns as your paper was folded. Mark one "front" and the other "back".

Take the "front" piece and cut out outer fabric, lining and a piece of wadding. Cut out eye, nose and whisker shapes in the contrasting fabric, and sew onto the outer fabric using zig-zag stitch to hide raw edges. Make the arms and legs by sewing together little sock-shapes of fabric, turning them out and filling with wadding. Attach these to the front of your cover, facing inwards.

Place your lining wrong-side up on a table, put the wadding and front (right-side up) on top of that. Sew all the way round to join. Keep the arms and legs facing inward as you sew.

Take your "back" pattern and cut in half horizontally, 10cm from the top, so the pattern is in two pieces. This slit will be where you put the hot water bottle in. Cut wadding, outer fabric and lining for each of these two back pieces, adding a 1cm seam allowance along each side of the slit.

For each piece, place the outer fabric and lining right sides together. Then pin the wadding to the outer fabric and sew across the straight line that will become the slit in the back of your cover. Flip the lining over the wadding so the right sides are showing and stitch around the remaining edges.

Place the back pieces right-side up and put the front on top, right-side down. Fold bias binding around the raw edges and stitch, leaving the neck. Turn the cover right-sides out, sew bias binding around the raw edges at the neck. Pop the hot-water bottle through the slit in the back. Secure a circle of fabric with an elastic band over the neck.

Source : Danielle Proud - Guardian

Colourful Coffee Filter Snowflakes

Materials (coffee filters, markers, newspaper, scissors)

- Round coffee filters are easiest for the younger children. Any shape works with older kids.
- Colour with markers. Any shapes, any design, any amount.
- Plan to experiment with the first ones until the children can see how they turn out.
- When finished colouring, move the snowflakes onto newspaper and spray with water. The children can flick drops of water on them, ring a wet wash cloth over them, anything to get water onto the coloured filters.
- They dry fast and are very sturdy-they don't fall apart.
- Fold at least three times, and then cut out shapes for the snowflake.

Paper Snowflakes

Materials - (paper, scissors, glitter - optional)

1. Start with any square piece of paper. If you are using a standard sheet of paper, take a bottom corner and diagonal fold it across to the opposite side of the page. Cut off the 2.5 inch strip at the top of the page to create an 8.5 x 8.5 sheet of paper. Fold it in half. Fold it in half again creating a smaller square.
2. One corner will be all folds, the other three corners will have some open edges. Finding the fold corner is key to making a snowflake.
3. Turn the paper so that the fold corner is at the bottom. Fold the corner on the right side over to the left side. You should now have a long, triangular paper, with the fold corner still at the bottom.
4. Depending on the thickness of the paper, and the children's skill with scissors, now may be when you start cutting out the snowflakes. Older children can continue folding the sides together to get narrower pieces of paper.

5. Cut off the tip opposite the fold corner. It can be point or rounded depending on the shape you want for your snowflake points.
6. Continue cutting out bits of the snowflake, but be sure to keep intact enough of the fold lines running out from the fold corner.
7. Open up your snowflake when you are finished cutting.
8. Use glitter glue to decorate it if you want.

Egg Carton Caterpillar

You'll need:

- The bottom of an egg carton (top removed)
- A pipe cleaner
- non-toxic paint

To Make:

- Take an egg carton and carefully rip the top off. Then carefully rip the bottom part in half so you have two different pieces for two caterpillars.
- Turn one half of the egg carton over so the "bumpy" pieces are on top.
- Have the kids paint their caterpillar with non-toxic paints. Don't forget to have your kids paint eyes in the front.
- Cut a pipe cleaner in half and tape or staple each piece to the top of the egg carton for antennas.

Snowman Bookmark

You will need:

- Blue card
- White paint
- Black pen
- A selection of other coloured pens
- Hole punch
- Thin coloured cord or embroidery silk to make a small tassel

Cut a rectangle 15cm x 5cm out of the blue card,



With the white paint and using a thumb print for the body and a finger print for the head, print several snowmen down the card. The number you can print will depend on the size of the child's fingers. Leave the snowmen prints to dry.

Using a black pen add a hat, some eyes and buttons. Then add noses; these can be orange as shown to represent an orange or a carrot and then add some scarves in the colours of your choice.

To complete the bookmark, punch a hole at the bottom and add a tassel.

Make the tassel by cutting five 12cm lengths of coloured cord or embroidery silk. Fold the lengths in half by looping them over your finger, then push the looped ends through the small hole on the bookmark from the front to the back. Allow enough to pull the loose end through the loop and tighten up like a tying a tie.

If you have access to a laminator the bookmarks can be laminated to make them more durable. This obviously needs to be done before you punch the hole. Once laminated, trim round leaving a small overlap so that they are completely sealed and finish off as above.