

WEEKDAY WONDERS



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Wild World of Art: Day 2

Art is just as important as science to help us understand our world. This week in Weekday Wonders, your young scientist will explore the wild world of art through nature! Your scientist will experiment with using different materials from nature including rocks, dirt, water, sticks, and leaves to create amazing artworks.

These curated activities are listed in a suggested sequence but may be done in the order that works best for you and your young scientists. Learn more about this series in the [Introduction to Weekday Wonders](#).



Question of the Day

What kind of art can you make with dirt?



Daily Nature Journal

Spending quiet time outside in nature completing a daily nature journal is an excellent way for young scientists to hone their observational skills. It also teaches patience and the art of reflection. To help your young scientist in this, use the [Guide to Nature Journaling](#).



Diggin' Up Dirt

Ask your young scientist if s/he remembers the brain teaser from [yesterday's Weekday Wonders](#). The answer is that this week's Weekday Wonders started with rocks because they break down to form the parts of soil or dirt. This could be due to wind, water, or temperature. Today your young scientist will get to explore dirt more.

Give your young scientist a trowel, small shovel, or old spoon and encourage him/her to collect and identify different types of soil from your surroundings. As your young scientist collects the soils he/she should keep them separate. The samples can be put in paper bags or wrapped in newspaper and labeled. Challenge him or her to find several different kinds of soil.

Have your scientist examine each sample and discuss what is similar and what is different between them. S/he may notice colors, textures, or other characteristics.

For older scientists, you may wish to share the following descriptions to see if s/he can identify the types of soil. If s/he is missing a type, have your scientist take another look for it. The four soil types are sandy soil, silt, clay, and loam.

- **Sand** is simply ground up rock. It has the largest grain size among soils.
- **Clay** is the most finely ground rock that makes up soil.
- **Silt** is soil with a grain size in between sand and clay.
- **Loam** is a combination of sand, silt and clay and also has some organic material, like ground up leaves and sticks in it. The organic material is called *humus*.

Have your scientist save each of the soil samples for the next activities.



Layered Soil Art

Give your young scientist a clear, wide-mouthed container with a top. Glass is best, but plastic will work. Have your scientist use the soil samples from the previous activity to create layered soil art.

To do this, have your scientist add different layers of soil to the jar using a hand or spoon. Your scientist should be able to create different patterns or designs using the different kinds of soil s/he found. Have your scientist tamp down each layer before adding the next. This will help the design stay in place.

Show your scientist how to hold the container at an angle to create layers that are not horizontal. He or she should still tamp down each layer, but having different angles can help add interest to the design. Remind your scientist to slowly and carefully bring the container back to an upright position so the layers are not disturbed.

Your scientist may also choose to add layers of pebbles, grass, leaves, or other items to vary the design even more. If s/he finds living things in the soil, ask him or her to release them back to their homes rather than trapping them in the art.

If your scientist is interested in keeping the soil art, fill the container as full as possible and tamp down the dirt to add more. Once the container is completely full close the lid. Making sure the container is full and that there is no space will help the design see in place even if the container moves.



Painting with Dirt

Different colors and textures in dirt make it a great medium for painting. Give your scientist some paper – newspaper, butcher paper, printer paper, or any other paper you have available. Give him or her small containers and a larger container of water.

Have your scientist add a dirt sample to each container. At this point, have your scientist add only one type of dirt to each. Then ask him or her to add a little water to each sample to make a paint-like consistency. More water will give an effect like transparent water colors, while less water will make a thicker “paint” like acrylics.

Tell your scientist to try out the different paints on the paper using a paintbrush or fingers. This will give your scientist an idea of what each paint looks like. If s/he would like to add more water or more soil to get a better effect, have your scientist do so.

Once your scientist has tested all the “paints,” s/he can get creative. Have your scientist create art using some or all of the following variations.

- Mix different soil samples to get different effects.
- Use different tools, such as sticks, rocks, or grasses to paint.
- Try painting on different surfaces, such as different papers, rocks, fabric, or wood.
- Make a painting on concrete. (You may wish to test the concrete for staining in an out-of-the-way spot.) This could be a large painting or several smaller ones. Take pictures and then clean up the area with a hose.



Reflecting on Dirt

Nature journals help scientists keep records, make observations, track changes, and reflect on nature. Have your young scientist do each of the following activities to practice the different ways to use a nature journal.

Keep records: Make a smear of each kind of soil on a page in the journal. Label the smears with the name of the soil type and where you found it.

Make observations: Choose a living thing to observe outside. Write or draw the living thing and add information about how soil benefits it.

Track changes: Consider the living thing and how it might build or enrich soil. Can you see any evidence of those changes? What could you look for? Make a table or observation sheet that will let you record information and check back periodically to track changes to soil in an area.

Reflect on nature: Make a small piece of art in the journal using dirt painting. Focus on something that you see or the way nature makes you feel as you paint.