

Foreword

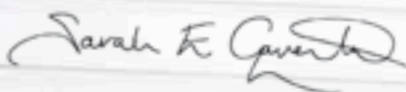
Ask anyone where their favourite childhood play space was and they will most likely describe somewhere outdoors, a natural space well away from adults. Yet play spaces today are primarily made up of fixed play equipment on a highly coloured, rubberised surface, surrounded by uninviting fencing; more commonly known as a 'KFC playground': Kit, fence and carpet. This approach is not only costly to local authorities but lacks physical and imaginative opportunities for young people so they can explore, be challenged or gain a sense of adventure. Play design needs to take a radical new approach to make spaces that are more accessible, better integrated and fun places to be; for children from eight months to eighty.

Increasingly children's bedrooms are becoming like the control deck of a spaceship packed with flashing, high-tech gizmos. Where previous generations only used their bedrooms for sleeping, modern technology and our fear of crime is now trapping children in their homes. Thankfully to counteract this the UK is currently undergoing a resurgence of nature play, where the use of natural materials and undulating surfaces provides stimulating and imaginative landscapes for play. 'Nature Play: Simple and Fun Ideas for All' helps to clarify and demystify what is meant by 'nature play' to practitioners and funders.

Growing research is providing evidence of the benefits of nature play for children's physical and mental well-being. In these environments children can experience the challenges of life, and develop the real skills and abilities to assess risk. Encouraging children to get outside, play in the wild and get dirty can also help combat issues such as obesity and anti-social behaviour, and at the end of the day is a lot more fun.

Public space is continuously changing: Planting matures and changes over time and a place in winter will feel very different to one in the summer. This should be reflected in the spaces children play in. Good design is about creating a place that functions well, both now and in the future. It should also be attractive, providing an inspirational and special place for children. This guide provides simple and fun ideas on how to achieve this through the use of natural elements such as fallen trees and wild flowers. Playing in natural environments encourages interaction amongst children of all abilities and most ideas in this guide are suitable for all.

The Forestry Commission's role in pioneering play policy, guidance and practice is to be applauded. CABE Space welcomes this guide and hopes it will inspire not only local forest managers, but all those involved in designing and managing public spaces to help create a more child-friendly public realm; a world away from springy chickens and purple, plastic slides.



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