



EARTH DAY BIRTHDAY CAKE

With each birthday we celebrate another year of life and a new beginning. Spring is the season in which we enjoy the rebirth of nature after its long winter sleep, so it's the perfect time to throw a birthday party for the Earth! It's no coincidence that Earth Day, marking the founding of the worldwide environmental movement, takes place during the northern spring, on 22 April every year.

Spring is the time when many animals are born, when birds hatch from their eggs and the land becomes colourful and vibrant with blossom and flowers, ready for bugs to feast on the nectar and pollinate the fruits to come. Indeed, we can think of spring and the explosion of life and colour that it brings as nature's way of celebrating – and what better way to join in than by throwing a birthday party?



This is messy play at its best: a mud cake made from earth and water, decorated with nature's gems – fallen petals, leaves, sticks and stones . . . whatever the forest floor provides to shape the choices of the designer.



By engaging in this sort of active free play, children become fully immersed in and connected to the environment, developing both physically and cognitively to better understand, interact with and navigate the world around them. As they look for and carry their chosen decorations, noticing the different textures and shapes of

the objects they find, their senses are fully engaged, and the free play involved in pretending to bake, decorate and eat the cake allows for fantastic role-playing opportunities and make-believe games, firing up their imagination and inspiring their creative thinking. Celebrating the world together in this activity connects us not only to the Earth, but also to each other, developing a sense of community, empathy and hopefully inspiring a future generation of environmental custodians.

Get Ready

This is definitely an activity for old clothes that no one will mind getting (very!) dirty. Choose a spot for your celebrations –

LOCATION	Any natural area with soil and trees	
AGE GROUP	2 years +	
LEARNING ABOUT ...	Being active ✳ teamwork ✳ community ✳ empathy ✳ role play ✳ sensory, nature ✳ connections ✳ imagination ✳ creativity ✳ sustainability	
KIT	→ Water (if a nearby source is not available) → Containers to carry	water (suitable for little hands) → Trowel/small spade for each child
OPTIONAL	→ Wooden spoons, buckets or bowls for mixing mud, candles and a lighter/matches, paper plates, cupcake cases, rubbish bags	





somewhere with lots of soil. Make sure it is free of litter, and near to fallen petals and other natural objects (such as sticks, pebbles and feathers) to use to decorate the cake. It's useful if there is somewhere to wash hands nearby; if not, bring water and soap. Get the children to collect water (from a natural source, if there is one) in the containers. If you are not using spoons, they can also collect some sticks for mixing the "cake mixture". Give everyone a trowel.

Get Set

Trowels in hand, everyone digs a hole - they can make a big one together if they want to. If you live in an area of clay soil, mud can easily be made in the ground by pouring water into the hole and then adding the loose soil back in. If the soil is more sandy and water is likely to seep away, put the soil and water into a bucket or similar container. Mix well using your sticks or spoons.

Go!

Once you've made the mud, it's time to build the cake! You can either make one big cake or lots of little ones. Using the trowels or bare hands, start piling up the mud in your chosen spot, moulding the cake into whatever shape you like - a rectangle or circle, perhaps - anything goes! Once you've got a shape you like, start to add some natural decorations. As this is a cake for the Earth, ask the children to find decorations they think the Earth would like. They can explore their surroundings as they search for the



perfect feather, stick, pebble or flower. You could also make other party food, such as mud sausages or mud marshmallows on a stick or mud cupcakes (if you have brought cases).

Once the cake is complete, it's time to add your candles (these can be wax candles that you light, or pretend wooden stick ones) and gather everyone together to sing "Happy Birthday" to the Earth. Maybe the children will want to pretend to eat the cake or leave it for the Earth and its creatures. Celebrations may continue with party games, or it may feel like the right time to end. Before leaving, have everyone gather up any litter to take home.

Endings

At the end of the activity, you might like to discuss with the children what the Earth might like as a gift on its birthday. Some ideas could include planting a new tree, putting up a bird feeder, or making an effort to use less water. This can open up great discussions about how we can all be more friendly to the environment. We are a part of the world, so when we look after it, we are looking after ourselves, too. You could ask the children how old everyone thinks the Earth is (4,543 billion years!), and how long people have lived on it (about 200,000 years). You may like to talk about what the children love best about our magnificent planet. Let the conversation take its own course - we find that, when talking about the Earth, it usually ends up somewhere amazing.



TRY THIS!

If you find that your cake is a little bit runny, try lining the outside with lots of twigs of about the same length, which helps keep everything in place.

