Making a mud kitchen

By Jan White

MUDDYFACES

Dedication

"This leaflet is dedicated to all the children who have shown us the deep pleasures of mud play, and to all those practitioners who push the boundaries to enable young children access to the outdoors in an elemental and meaningful way."

Photograph copyright - Menna Godfrey

cover image by Carol Duffy

Thanks to contributors

Many thanks to the children, adults and settings who have so generously shared images of their own mud kitchens at work:

Carol Duffy, Ireland
Jan White http://janwhitenaturalplay.wordpress.com]
Jane Wratten and Slinn St STARters, Sheffield jane.wratten@gmail.com
Liz Magraw and Ruth Sharpe, Hind Leys Preschool, Leicestershire, http://hindleyspreschool.co.uk/
Liz Knowles, Muddy Faces www.muddyfaces.co.uk http://www.facebook.com/MuddyFaces
Menna Godfrey and Quackers Playgroup, York mennagodfrey@googlemail.com
Suzanne Scott, Ann Thompson and Sandfield Natural PLay Centre, Sandfield House, Lickers Lane, Whiston, Merseyside L35 3SR Telephone number: 0151 4266262
Vanessa Lloyd and Christchurch County Primary School, Ernest Street, Rhyl, Clwyd, LL18 2DS.

Making a mud kitchen

Text copyright
© Jan White

Photographs copyright: cover image by Carol Duffy
Photographs ©Ann Thompson, ©Carol Duffy, ©Jan White, ©Jane Wratten, ©Liz Knowles, ©Liz Magraw ©Mena Godfrey, ©Vanessa Lloyd

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form, or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without either permission in writing from the publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying.

This book is published by Muddy Faces, a leading supplier of Forest School equipment and challenging outdoor play resources. All our products are used and recommended by experienced practitioners.
Muddyfaces Ltd
40 Olivet Road
Sheffield
S88QS
www.muddyfaces.co.uk 01142219617

Disclaimer: the author and publisher cannot take any responsibility for the use of the ideas and guidance given in this publication. As with any aspect of early years provision, it is always necessary to carry out ongoing risk assessment and management according to the specific children, situation and conditions pertaining.

The information and ideas provided have been created to help increase the understanding and confidence of practitioners aiming to develop mud play and mud kitchens with groups.
The author makes no claim that the information in this book is complete. Neither the author nor contributors can accept any legal responsibility for any harm, injury, damage, loss or prosecution resulting from any activities or guidance described.

Contents

Just Do It! - Guidelines for Creating a Mud Kitchen
Choose the Place
Make the Space
Fit it Out
Places to Find what you need
Get Busy In It!
Being a Good Assistant
Delving into the Meanings of Mud Play
Keeping it Safe and Healthy
Children's Books to go with Mud Kitchen Play
Further information

Just do it

Just Do It! - Guidelines for Creating a Mud Kitchen

There is little more important in our physical world than earth and water and they are truly intriguing things, especially when they interact. Mixing soil, water and a range of other natural materials has a foundational role in early childhood which has deep importance and endless possibilities for well-being, development and learning. The breadth and depth of what these experiences offer young children is truly remarkable.

Mud kitchens provide something quite different to a soil digging patch, whilst also being much more easily managed. A mud kitchen includes elements of the much-loved domestic corner and cooking from indoor play, which are then hugely enriched through the special nature of being outside. Mud kitchens work well all year round, and need to be seen as a core element of continuous provision outside.

Mud kitchens do not need to be fancy and certainly do not need to cost much. There is nothing to beat the simplicity and character of creating your own unique kitchen from scrounged, begged and discovered items. And remember, the best mud kitchens are made in collaboration with the children who will be using them.

Choose the Place

The kitchen needs a handy and **ample supply of the basic materials of sand and/or mud**. Offering both provides contrast in colour, texture and mixing behaviour – and many more possibilities for imaginations. Being situated near the sand area or mud patch may give the kitchen more context and meaning, but big pots of these basic materials will also be fine, preferably at floor level for ease of access.

Mud kitchens that have **walls, fences or other vertical surfaces** on one or two sides then have potential for hanging pots and utensils on them or for installing shelving, making it feel more kitchen-like and better to use. A corner also creates room-like enclosure that feels cosy and safe, which research suggests is good at generating dramatic play in young children.

A **water supply** is essential, but it does not need to be in the kitchen or even close-by, as children love to fill containers both large and small to transport across to the kitchen for use. Make sure however that there are several types of collecting containers for this activity and an ample (preferably running) water source, such as an outdoor tap, water butt or a large container of water.

Gravel, pebbles and other natural materials are also natural companions for concoction making. If these are not generally available in the outdoor space, then good-sized containers need to be kept topped up for good supplies (consider drainage of these if kept in the open air).

Plant material is also an important ingredient of a good mud kitchen. This can be anywhere – children just need permission to pick and gather – and some agreed boundary rules so that plants can keep supplying! Lots of robust, pickable plants spread around the whole outdoor space are ideal.

One last thought is to locate the kitchen near to **compatible activities**, such as good places for den play, as these complementary aspects of provision will enhance each other, enriching experience for the children.

Make the space

Make the Space

Kitchens can be all sizes, but the **size will influence the feel of the place** and, therefore, probably the kind of activity that takes place. Room for several children to work alongside or in collaboration seems important. Large, open-plan kitchens may well generate more boisterous themes and actions. A choice of both large and small nook-like kitchens would be ideal in a group setting.

Enclosure from fences and walls (as above) or by installing low level boundaries such as wicker fencing (so that children can see over but the space feels enclosed by them) can create a good mud kitchen feel. A roof is not necessary as this would prevent the elements being part of the stimulus and range of experiences. Some kitchens that are in the middle of an open sand/digging area work fine too, but perhaps have less sense of being a special place.

In creating some sense of enclosure, it's important not to separate the kitchen from the rest of the outdoor space. It needs to be **easy to get in and out** and to see in and out, and it needs to interact with whatever else is going on outdoors.

Working surfaces are a crucial element. These need to be at the right height for the children and to provide enough space to work at, with all the mess that creative kitchen work entails.

Shelving and cupboards add much to the feeling and functionality of the kitchen. It's really helpful if each pot and utensil stands out by itself (compared to the jumble of a box full of stuff), and is easy to get at. **Hooks** on walls or the front edge of shelves and **baskets** to separate types of utensil can be useful (beware that hooks are not at eye-poking height).

Finally, consider where all the **old mixed material** is going to go after use!

Fit it out

Fit it Out

An old **cupboard** or two; a dresser is perfect!

Work top with plenty of surface to work at

Something to be the **cooker** in pretend play (an old microwave can be very effective, having a very satisfying door to open and close, and buttons to push)

Shelving above and behind the work surface, or a tall cupboard to one side.

A good basic selection of **pots and pans, jugs and funnels, bakeware** etc.

An interesting collection of common **kitchen utensils**, together with a few unusual and intriguing ones, such as an ice-cream scoop.

Plenty of **bowls and containers**, again a range of the common ones and a few special ones such as jelly moulds or ice-cube trays.

Supplies of natural materials in **small containers and/or jars** (lids that stay attached are ideal as they do not get lost).

Plants for picking, mixing and grinding.

Enhancements for suitable occasions, such as a selection of food colourings, essences, herbs and spices, chalk for grinding and mixing, and 'special' ingredients to add the final magical touches to potions and spells.

A big **washing up bowl**, especially one sunk into the worktop, is very helpful as part of the play and for washing up afterwards.

Note, specific dressing up clothes are not needed!

Places to Find
what you Need

Places to Find what you need

The best mud kitchens, and those which have the most atmosphere and character, are made from found, gathered and donated items – especially when these come from the children's own families. It's important not to spend much money – what matters to children is that these things come from the real human world, to combine with the stuff of the real physical world[MSOffice1].

Here are a few possibilities:

Families of children and staff – specific requests and lucky finds; items used in a range of represented cultures; the perfect little old cupboard might come from someone's garage

Charity and second-hand shops – especially for interesting tableware, bakeware and utensils

Emporia and house clearance sales – can yield some really interesting and unusual things

Furniture recycling centres, such as REMAR – can yield some quirky and cheap cupboards and dressers

Specialist suppliers, such as Muddy Faces – for a range of really interesting and unusual resources to set up and extend mud kitchens.

Get Busy

Get Busy In It!

The mud kitchen context and materials result in young children engaging in an **incredible variety of actions**, such as: filling, pouring, emptying, transferring, mixing, stirring, whisking, frothing, scooping, ladling, handling, moulding, patting, smoothing, mark-making, throwing, splatting, splashing, sharing out, serving, foraging, selecting, picking, collecting, gathering, garnishing, shredding, crushing, mashing, grinding, measuring, adding, brewing, boiling, sieving, filtering, separating, pipetting and decanting!

In the same way, the **range of potential experiences** is vast, including sorting, classifying, cooking, transforming, creating, enquiring, testing, repeating, experimenting, naming, labelling, decorating, embellishing, selling and using.

The perfect stimulus of experiencing and exploring the physical transformations (doing) taking place puts the brain into the perfect place for **creating mental transformations (imagination)** – and the mix easily becomes coffee with sugar, a birthday cake, soups and stews, ice cream in many flavours, lotions and 'make-up', magical drinks and potions, wizard's spells and perfumes… This work is filled with **emotional, personal and social** value, and offers the context for learning a wonderful range of new and interesting **vocabulary and verbal language exchange and expression.**

Being a
good
Assistant

Being a Good Assistant

The main role adults need to take is of **facilitator and enabler** – making the kitchen available (best constructed by helping the children to create it to their own specifications), and supporting the play that then emerges from the children.

Good adult support consists of **observing** (noticing what is really taking place), striving to **understand** (recognising the significance of this for this child and this group of children) and then **responding** according to careful consideration as to what would help the child the most (which might be standing back out of the way!).

Supplying **useful language** for equipment, actions and descriptions can be very helpful provided it is done in context where it makes sense (and is not overdone!).

There is so much to mud kitchen play and its deeper meanings for children that the role of **researcher** would be highly valuable.

Other adults may not understand why this is all so valuable and important, and may have many objections, so supporting adults also need to **interpret** what is really happening and **advocate** for mud play in all children's lives.

Delving

Delving into the Meanings of Mud Play

Young children are endlessly interested in – and **biologically programmed to explore** – the stuff of the earth, how materials behave and what they do.

Making connections through discovering and investigating **cause and effect** is the stuff of brain development and scientific process. Curiosity, fascination and the pleasure of finding thing out are fundamentally important to the human state – being human.

An even more powerful level of experience for the explorer is that *they* are the one making things happen – giving **feelings of control and power,** and over time, building a child who has a strong inner sense of agency (which itself is key to well-being and mental health).

The processes of making 'concoctions' brings the worlds of science and art completely together through **possibility thinking**. The growth of imagination and creativity happens through building on concrete cause-and-effect experience to posing and predicting 'what if…?' Good scientists do this all the time, as do artists and all other innovators.

Even better, the experience of making concoctions brings the child into the realms of **magic and fantasy** – reminding us of the ancient fascinations of **alchemy**.

Keeping it Safe
FISKARS

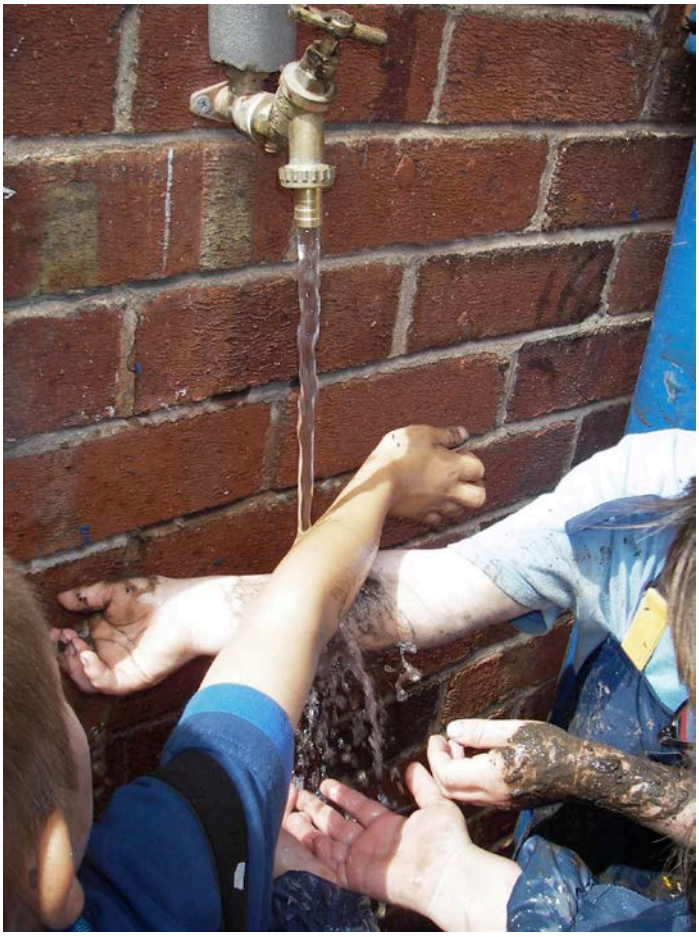
Keeping it Safe and Healthy

First and foremost, children must be kept **safe enough** whilst they have access to the important experiences that they need for full and healthy development. Our job is to manage an opportunity to make it safely available – not to remove it in the name of 'health and safety'. The requirement is to be 'as safe as necessary' rather than 'as safe as possible' (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents).

The current official approach is one of **risk-benefit assessment** – better thought of as benefit-risk assessment: that is, consider why the experience matters and then manage to make it available. Much more can be found in the government endorsed document *Managing Risk in Play Provision*, available to download from the Play England website: http://www.playengland.org.uk/resources/managing-risk-in-play-provision-implementation-guide?originx_9424fe_1139449502553e76o_2009171038g

Contact with soil is actually beneficial as the bacteria in it help to build healthily functioning immune systems in young children (See *Why Dirt is Good* in booklist under 'Further information'), and research also suggests that this contact produces serotonin in the body – which makes us feel happy! (www.livescience.com/health Article 11 April 2007 Depressed? Go Play in the Dirt). The medically-supported *Hygiene Hypothesis* suggests that contact with the beneficial germs that we have evolved with is vital, and that harm is done by over sanitising children as we currently do.

Soil can however carry harmful pathogens, and care to ensure no contamination from cat and dog faeces is extremely important. A useful approach for mud kitchens is to supply soil from purchased **loam topsoil** rather than from gardens or uncovered plant borders (all garden centres sell this; don't try compost as it does not behave sufficiently like soil for satisfactory mud play). Freshly excavated mole hills also supply lovely clean topsoil! Sand in sandpits is also best covered with a light mesh out of hours (for more on this, see *Playing and Learning Outdoors* in booklist under 'Further information').



Handwashing is important after playing in this way, so routines and expectations must be agreed with the children, set up to work easily and adhered to, to embed hand-washing as habitual. The best first stage to this is to establish the routine that children wash up the pots they have used in a large bowl of warm, soapy water!

Children also need to **stay warm and comfortable** – and mud kitchen work is likely to be wet and messy. Waterproof dungarees with wellies offer the best protection for most of the year in the UK – the best hot weather attire would be old shorts and T-shirt! Somewhere to wash muddy suits down and hang to dry should be part of any well-operating outdoor provision.

The best risk management processes **involve the children** as a core control measure – always introduce new resources and experiences carefully, simply and slowly (one at a time, with plenty of time in between) with lots of emphasis on helping children access them safely and effectively. Less is always more with young children's experiences!

Ask the children to look for things they think could be harmful and get their agreement as to the best ways **they can manage these** (with your support when needed), such as pots on the ground being a tripping hazard.

Pots and utensils need to be kept in good condition and will need to be **washed and dried** reasonably often to avoid them rusting and becoming unpleasant to use. Keeping them drained and aerated is a very good idea, and occasionally wiping a light coat of cooking oil (with paper towels or cloths) prevents rust and mould. Storing resources in open-net sacks or wire baskets is also a solution.

Childrens Books

Children's Books to go with Mud Kitchen Play

Mud Itself:

- **Mudlarks** in **Out and About** by Shirley Hughes (Walker Books, 2005) ISBN 1-84428-473-5
- **Mud Pie Annie** by Sue Buchanan and Dana Shafer (Zonder Kids, 2001) ISBN 10-0-310-70816-8
- **Mud** by Mary Lyn Ray & Lauren Stringer (Voyager Books, 1996) ISBN 978-0-15-202461-1
- **Mud Puddle** by Robert Munsch & Sami Suomalainen (Annick, 2008) ISBN 1-55037-468-0
- **Princess Pigsty** by Cornelia Funke & Kerten Meyer (Chicken House, 2007) ISBN 978-1-905294-32-9
- **Joe's Café** by Rose Impey & Sue Porter (Orchard Books, 1993) ISBN 1-85213-563-8
- **The Mud Family** by Betsy James & Paul Morin (Oxford University Press, 1994) ISBN 0-19-512479-0

Potions and Spells:

- **The Slimy Book** by Babette Cole (Red Fox, 2003) ISBN 978-0-099-43426-9
- **Spells** by Emily Gravett (Macmillan Children's Books, 2008) ISBN 978-0-230-01492-3
- **Professor Puffendorf's Secret Potions** by Robin Tzannes & Korky Paul (Oxford University Press, 1992) ISBN 978-0-19-272712-1 (Available from muddyfaces)
- **Memory Bottles** by Beth Shosan & Katie Pamment (Meadowside Children's Books, 2004) ISBN 1-904511-62-7

Cooking with Mud:

- **Goldilocks and the Three Bears** by Nicola Baxter & Liz Pichon (Ladybird Books) ISBN 0-7214-9733-0
- **Pumpkin Soup** by Helen Cooper (Picture Corgi Books, 1999) ISBN 0-552-54510-4
- **Delicious** by Helen Cooper (Doubleday, 2006) ISBN 0-385-60498-X
- **Stone Soup** by Jess Stockham (Child's Play, 2006) ISBN 978-1-84643-021-3
- **The Essential Soup Cookbook** (The Australian Women's Weekly) ISBN 186396192-5
- **Mud Pies and Other Recipes** by Marjorie Winslow (The New York Review of Books, 1998 – originally 1961) ISBN 978-1-59017-368-8 (Available from muddyfaces)
- **The Australian Women's Weekly** range of small, full colour illustrated recipe books: Café Cakes; Cheesecakes, Pavlovas & Trifles; Jams & Jellies; Pickles & Chutneys; Casseroles
- **Ice Cream Machine Book: frozen delights from homemade ice creams and sorbets to sauces and desserts** by Rosemary Moon (Apple Press 2006) ISBN 978-1845430993
- **Fantastic Cocktails & Mixed Drinks**, Family Circle (Murdock Books) ISBN 0-86411-383-8
- **Pancakes, Pancakes** by Eric Carle (Aladdin Paperbacks, 1991) ISBN 978-0-689-82246-9
- **Mama Panya's Pancake: a village tale from Kenya** by Mary & Rich Chamberlin & Julia Cairns (Barefoot Books, 2006) ISBN 1-905236-63-8
- **Pie in the Sky** by Lois Ehlert (Harcourt Inc, 2004) ISBN 0-15-216584-3

Further information

International Mud Day 2012 The second year of the highly successful and exciting global celebration instigated by the Nature Action Collaborative for Children (World Forum Foundation for Early Childhood Education and Care) – participation is required!
http://worldforumfoundation.org/wf/wp/initiatives/nature-action-collaborative-for-children/international-mud-day-2011/stories/

The Mud Centre A great article on Recapturing childhood through authentic mud play
http://www.communityplaythings.com/resources/articles/dramaticplay/mudcenter.html

Parents Put Mud Pie Making Top for Toddler Development BBC News report 10th January 2012 Survey of 1000 parents by Cow and Gate on activities children should do before they are three (the 'Potty List'). http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-16485368

Let the children play blog has many posts on mud kitchens in her own practice and from blogs around the world, all vibrantly home made
http://progressiveearlychildhoodeducation.blogspot.com/

Let the children play Pinterest board has lots of great images of mud kitchens
http://pinterest.com/mamabare42/early-childhood-outdoor-learning-environments/

The Ice Cream Factory by Paddy Beals, Early Education Journal, Summer 2009 p8-9. Fabulous play developing outside at Wingate Nursery School & Children's Centre.

Jan White's Web/blog site for a range of articles, resources, training and posts on being, playing and learning outdoors http//:janwhitenaturalplay.wordpress.com

Playing and Learning Outdoors by Jan White, has list of good resources for 'pies, potions and perfumes' p60 (available from Muddy Faces www.muddyfaces.co.uk and Amazon online booksellers)

Why Dirt is Good: 5 ways to make germs your friends by Mary Ruebush, PhD (an immunologist who trains doctors). Explains how the immune system and allergies are built, and the need for bacteria in healthy outcomes of these processes http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-500165_162-4766105.html

The Dirt on Dirt: How Getting Dirty Outdoors Benefits Kids

The National Wildlife Federation – be out there
While many times getting our hands dirty is frowned upon, Be Out There has some new facts and figures that may have you throwing your kids into the nearest mud puddle. In their latest report, they reveal how getting down and dirty in the great outdoors – far from being a bad thing – helps children lead happier, healthier lives. ***Get in on our dirty little secret!***
http://www.nwf.org/Get-Outside/Be-Out-There/Why-Be-Out-There/Benefits/The-Dirt-on-Dirt.aspx

Examples of Mud Kitchens

There are thousands of examples of amazing mud kitchens available on the internet. Here are just a few different ones we have found from around the globe.

http://rhythmofthehome.com/archives/summer-2010/mud-pie-kitchen/
http://www.childmag.co.za/content/playing-dirt-and-mud-builds-childs-immunity
http://www.childcentralstation.com/2011/05/mud-pie-kitchen-renovation.html
http://progressiveearlychildhoodeducation.blogspot.co.uk/2011/05/play-heats-up-in-outdoor-kitchen.html
http://mrsm-adventuresplay.blogspot.co.uk/2011/05/mud-pie-kitchen-national-trust.html
http://www.athomewithali.net/2012/03/mud-garden-part-3.html
http://simple-whimsy.blogspot.co.uk/2011/04/outdoor-mud-pie-kitchen.html
http://gironlife.blogspot.co.uk/2011/07/mud-pie-kitchen.html
http://tinkerlab.com/2011/06/mud-pie-kitchen-beta-version/
http://stompinginthemud.blogspot.co.uk/
http://sewliberated.typepad.com/sew_liberated/2011/05/menu-chocolate-pancakes-mud-pie-sweet-gum-ball-ice-cream-mud-bread-with-herbs-it-didnt-take-the-daddy.html
http://www.growingajeweledrose.com/2012/03/mud-pie-kitchen.html
http://progressiveearlychildhoodeducation.blogspot.co.uk/2010/03/ways-to-incorporate-mud-play-into.html
http://www.preschoolexpress.com/theme_station06/may06_mud.shtml
http://progressiveearlychildhoodeducation.blogspot.co.uk/2011/08/10-reasons-why-we-should-let-children.html
http://learningin21.edublogs.org/2012/02/17/we-love-mud/
http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/clips/children-play-in-the-mud/10632.html
http://happyhooligans.wordpress.com/category/mud-play/
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tdCn_KkXM4w&feature=fvwrel
http://simplemom.net/let-your-kids-get-dirty/
http://www.playcreateexplore.com/2011/06/mud-pie-kitchen.html
http://chasingthesseasons.blogspot.co.uk/2011/05/mud-pie-kitchen-love.html

This Booklet is part of Muddy Faces initiative

“Outdoor play the natural way”

Outdoor play the natural way aims to support practitioners to access outdoor play through the provision of useful information and open ended resources. We are working in collaboration with inspiring specialist in the world of outdoor play, putting together thought provoking resources – all available on our website.

www.muddyfaces.co.uk

Making a Mud Kitchen - We would always encourage people to use recycled materials for mud play. If you require any extra resources, we have put together a comprehensive mud range. This includes resources such as soil and other natural materials, and fantastic collections and interesting items.

This document is published by Muddy Faces, a leading supplier of Forest School equipment and challenging outdoor play resources.
All our products are used and recommended by experienced practitioners.

MUDDYFACES www.muddyfaces.co.uk