

The background is a textured, light brown paper. At the top, there are several acorns with colorful, textured caps in shades of purple, blue, and teal. To the right, there are various flowers, including a large yellow one, a white daisy, and a pink one. On the left, there is a green leaf with small green circular accents. At the bottom, there are colorful, painted leaves in shades of orange, yellow, green, and blue, along with a string of colorful beads and pieces of driftwood.

Nature's Palette

ART ACTIVITIES
FOR ALL SEASONS

janine kloiber

The book cover features a decorative border of natural elements. At the top, there are three acorns with purple, blue, and teal caps, and a yellow paper basket filled with various flowers including a large yellow one, a white daisy, and a red rose. A green leaf with circular patterns is on the left. At the bottom, there are colorful autumn leaves in shades of orange, yellow, and purple, and a string of colorful beads (purple, blue, pink) with driftwood pieces.

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FOR ALL SEASONS

janine kloiber


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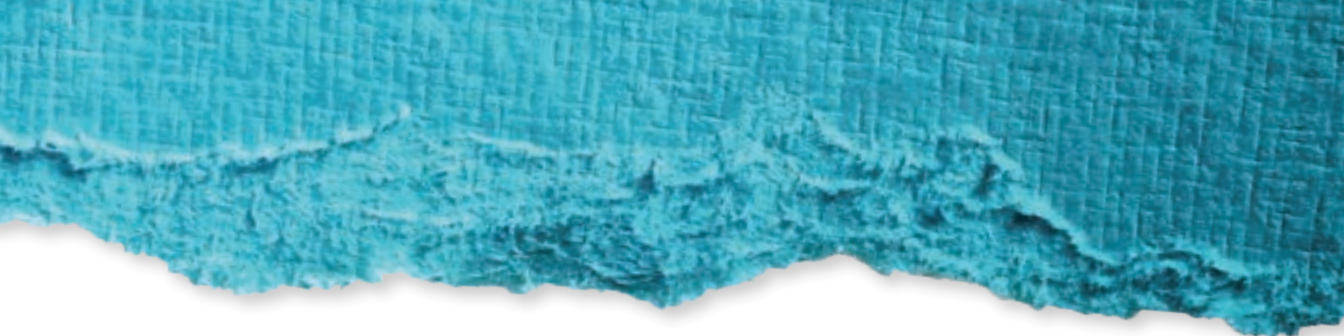
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Foreword

by MaryAnn F. Kohl

As a passionate advocate for art and creativity, I believe in trusting children to explore, discover, and experiment. To me, the process of creating is just as important as the final outcome. *Nature's Palette* opens the door for children to embrace the outdoors, discover nature's wonders, and incorporate those treasures into their art. Along the way, they develop an appreciation not only for the natural world, but also a sense of responsibility to care for and protect it.

Nature's Palette invites children into a vibrant world of natural treasures—where color, imagination, and creativity come together in joyful harmony. This book encourages young artists to explore the limitless possibilities of their own ideas and experiences through nature-inspired art and craft activities. Each project is a celebration of creativity, providing children with opportunities to connect deeply with the natural world and express themselves freely.

Throughout my career writing about process art, I've encouraged children to create using what's around them. This book builds on that philosophy, expanding their creative toolbox beyond crayons, scissors, paint, and glue. Working with nature invites children into a world of ever-changing textures, colors, and forms.



Take, for example, the Botanical Dyed Fabric Bracelets project featured in the summer section. Using rose petals as a natural dye, children can create beautiful, eco-friendly fabric patterns and then weave the fabrics into one-of-a-kind bracelets—no two are ever the same. In the spring section, Printing with Rain turns a rainy day into an artistic adventure. By layering colorful tissue paper onto a canvas pouch and letting the rain do the work, children witness the magic of nature’s touch transforming simple materials into vibrant, organic designs.

Exploring, discovering, and respecting individual experiences— isn’t this what children’s creativity should be about? *Nature’s Palette* gives children the space to explore, imagine, and create as they draw inspiration from nature and shape it into something uniquely their own. Creating in this way nurtures not only artistic expression but also inspires future thinkers, inventors, and caretakers of the Earth. I can’t think of a more meaningful way to engage children artistically as they explore the natural world.



Acknowledgments

This book is dedicated to my incredible collaborators, Josie and Leo, as well as to my wonderful husband for his unwavering support in every way I needed.

Also, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to MaryAnn Kohl, who guided me and helped turn my dream into reality.

Furthermore, I would like to thank Gryphon House and their team for their invaluable support and guidance during the publication process.

Introduction

Walking in the woods, feeling the sun's rays touch my face through the canopy of leaves, smelling the muddy forest floor, and listening to twigs and dried leaves crackle beneath my feet is simply magical. After a busy week at work, there's nothing more relaxing than spending time outside with the children, gleefully engaged in sensory exploration.

Such simple pleasures, yet we cannot take them for granted. Barraged by news of climate change and other threats, we know our struggling planet is in peril, and we have to change course before it's too late. Mother Earth is precious, and we need to protect her and all living things that call her home.

But where to start? That goal can seem impossible and overwhelming, but each of us can begin right in our homes and classrooms, with the children. Together, we can make a difference if we teach the younger generation to respect and protect nature. It's important for children to appreciate nature and to develop a sense of respect for our planet. By becoming aware of the beauty and fragility of nature, by standing still and looking around us and using all of our senses to explore, we can help children understand that the world is changing and that their actions can make a difference.

I am a passionate crafter; I always have been. I love sharing this passion as much as I love sharing my appreciation for the outdoors. At home and at school, we spend a lot of time outdoors and frequently bring home treasures to use for crafts. Sometimes, it's the most unusual objects that spark our creativity.

Two years ago, on a stroll through a local park, my daughter found a cicada exoskeleton. She had learned about them at school, so when she found the first one, she wanted to keep it and study it. She continued scouring the grounds and ended up finding more than we ever expected. We went home with forty-three (!) exoskeletons,

and my daughter created beautiful displays by transforming them into sparkling pieces of art. Afterward, she told me that she knew that a lot of her friends were scared of the look of these exoskeletons, and she wanted to show them how beautiful they could be. (You can find this activity on page 138.)

As a Montessori teacher and parent, I love to give children the courage to explore their creativity.

Dr. Maria Montessori once said, "Imagination does not become great until human beings, given the courage and strength, use it to create" (Smith, 2022). During my more than twenty years of teaching in a classroom and in art workshops, I learned a lot from my students. They showed me what they needed to feel comfortable, confident, and inspired to be creative. Throughout this book, I will show you easy ways to prepare and set up activities at home and in the classroom with materials and inspirations from nature, so that children can explore them independently and feel encouraged to discover the possibilities each project brings. I love when activities get "messy," but I understand that not all of us have a space where this is possible. I kept this in mind when writing this book. There is always a way to contain the messes.

Helping our children build self-esteem, express themselves in a positive way, think outside the box, and appreciate nature will make the world a better place. I hope you will join me on this quest.

Getting to Know Montessori

Are you familiar with the Montessori style of teaching? It significantly influences the activities in this book, so I offer an overview to help explain the basics. Dr. Maria Montessori developed her child-centered approach early in the twentieth century. Her goal was not only to prepare children academically but also to teach them skills and values that are necessary to thrive in the world.

One of the fundamental principles of the Montessori philosophy is to "follow the child." People often have the misconception that this means the children can do whatever they want. In the Montessori environment, it is understood that every child has individual strengths and needs and that, by observing, respecting, and addressing them, the educator can offer learning opportunities that are in sync with each child's development and unique needs.



"Montessori is a philosophy of life. A way of living, and of being with others but specifically, being with children."
(Davis and Uzodike, 2024)

Montessori classrooms offer many opportunities to develop practical life skills and hands-on learning. In my primary classroom (ages three to six years), you will find, for example, a hammering block with nails and a hammer, a tray that invites the children to grind soap, and a tray with materials for shoe polishing. All of these materials are “real,” meaning that they are not toys or pretend play supplies. The shoe can be worn. The ground soap bits can be used to make suds. The hammer will pound the nail into the wood. This helps the children to have a genuine connection with the world around them and makes the learning opportunities more meaningful.

The Montessori philosophy is reflected in this book’s activities, which offer numerous opportunities for children to develop practical life skills and to use real tools. I encourage you to modify the projects to fit the children’s needs. If any steps in an activity are too challenging, allow the children to watch and assist. If you repeat this project in the future, they will be better prepared to take on more steps independently. Encourage children to handle as much on their own as is safe and reasonable.

Additional information about Montessori and how to implement the philosophy in your home or classroom can be found in the recommendations on page 6.

About This Book

The activities are open ended and designed for children to explore, discover, and express themselves. Also included with most activities are directions for “companion crafts” as optional extensions. The book’s activities are designed to nurture children’s creativity. Children are invited to create and design while exploring different textures, colors, and scents with their senses.

In the Montessori classroom, the term *works* is used for activities offered. This honors the purposeful activity children engage in. The use of this term may be confusing for those not familiar with Montessori. Because this book has been written for use in many kinds of settings (child care, home, summer camps, traditional classrooms, art clubs, Montessori classrooms, libraries, and so on), I use the word *activities* instead of *works*.

This book is influenced by my Montessori background, but I have also worked for many years in different schools and childcare settings. I promise that experience in a traditional Montessori classroom is not required to enjoy the benefits of these activities. Working in a variety of different school systems has shown me that we can all learn and benefit from each other. We all want children to thrive and be happy, and if we share what works well for us, others can benefit from our knowledge.

The nature-inspired crafts in this book invite the children to slow down and appreciate the beauty around them. A rock is not only a rock but can also be a base for a candle, a canvas for a painting, a piece of a mosaic, or an embellishment for a wand. A twig is not only a twig but can also be a bunny, part of a pencil holder, or part of a weaving loom.

Dr. Montessori strongly believed in the essential role that nature plays in a child's education. She once said, "There must be provision for the child to have contact with nature; to understand and appreciate the order, the harmony, and the beauty in nature" (Montessori, 1966). Showing children creative ways to use nature's materials fosters a deeper understanding of our ecosystem. Involvement starts a conversation about our responsibility as humans toward nature. When we love and appreciate something, we are more inclined to protect it.

My family, students, and I collected the natural materials for this book in our area, but I understand that not everyone lives in an area surrounded by lakes, forests, and a variety of trees. In the activities, you will find alternative suggestions for some natural materials that might not be accessible to you. All the other materials used in my book can be found in most craft stores, but I also enjoy going "treasure hunting" at garage sales and thrift stores. At school, I often ask my students' parents for leftover fabrics, buttons, and yarn, and we receive such a colorful and interesting collection of all kinds of materials.

A Note about the Use of Food

Some schools and childcare programs do not allow the use of food in art or crafts. You will often find specific replacements for the food items in the supply list for each project. You can also substitute colorful paper cutouts, decorations made out of clay or Model Magic, or other saved collage items for the food items.





Nurture Creativity Through Nature, Art, and Montessori-Inspired Exploration

Every leaf, stone, and feather hold the potential to spark imagination and learning. *Nature's Palette* is a seasonal guide to open-ended art experiences that connect young children to the natural world while nurturing independence, creativity, and cognitive growth. Grounded in Montessori principles and rooted in nature-based learning, this book invites educators to rethink art time as an opportunity for discovery, reflection, and child-led expression.

With clear guidance and developmentally rich ideas, each chapter introduces versatile techniques—such as felting, marbling, stringing, and weaving—using found and sustainable materials.

Discover how to:

- Design seasonal, nature-based art provocations that promote curiosity and creativity
- Foster fine motor skills, sensory development, and emotional expression through art
- Encourage independence, problem-solving, and confidence in young learners
- Connect art-making to larger learning themes in science, literacy, and self-regulation

Nature's Palette is your essential guide to weaving nature, creativity, and skill-building into meaningful, joyful learning all year long.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Janine Kloiber is a Montessori-certified educator and practicing artist who served as the Primary and Art Directress at Creative Minds Montessori School in Auburn, NY. Drawing from her experience in both U.S. and German early childhood programs, she specializes in guiding children through nature-inspired creative learning rooted in child agency, wonder, and expression.


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