

Get Out!

What's living in your yard? When was the last time you watched a lizard going through his early morning pushup routine warming his body in the sunlight? Have you ever followed an ant trail to see where they were going? Is there still a little dirt under your fingernails from tinkering in your yard? I'm sure you have heard all the reports on the obesity of our nation, especially our kids. With the proliferation of electronic gadgets that make our lives easier, we seem to be neglecting our physical health. It seems today that the thumbs are the only part of the body that our kids are exercising.

Many of the younger generation suffer from what has been termed "Nature Deficit Disorder". Kids have a complex knowledge of TV cartoon characters or even of the Amazon Rain Forest but very few can tell you about the plant and animal life in their own backyard. Europe has been promoting "natural play and learning" for many years. In essence, this is nothing more than using the great outdoors as your classroom and playground. Nature provides wonderful opportunities to learn, to grow physically, to develop socially, to think and to create.



Natural playgrounds provide all the elements kids need to program their own experiences. The environment stimulates the artist, scientist, builder or performer in the child and lets them develop the infant talents they possess. Natural playgrounds provide gross motor skill development through walking, climbing, skating or riding. All the senses can be stimulated. Music, art and drama can play out spontaneously. It provides the perfect classroom for scientific exploration. Of course, what kid doesn't love and learn from a little dirt and water.

So get out ... outside that is and explore what you have at your fingertips.

For more information on natural play visit the following websites:

<http://earthplay.net/>

<http://naturalplaygrounds.com/>

<http://www.arborday.org/shopping/sourcebook/>

<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/ta-system/teaching/eecd/Natural%20Play%20Spaces>

Between two evils, I always pick the one I never tried before. – Mae West

FAVORITE FLORA:

APTENIA CORDIFOLIA- HEARTS AND FLOWERS



If you like the look of tropical succulent filled landscapes, and are wondering if there is a groundcover that thrives in the Las Vegas Valley, other than the beloved lantana. May we introduce Hearts and Flowers (*Aptenia cordifolia*). This South African native is a low growing groundcover with bright green heart-shaped fleshy leaves and bright pink flowers. Hearts and Flowers will grow to ten inches tall and will spread to two feet. It can tolerate full sun to partial shade and is hardy to 23°F.

Watering for this drought resistant succulent should be increased in the hot summer months. Although it is drought tolerant, this groundcover can also grow in areas that receive ample irrigation. It will be sure to attract butterflies and bees for most of the year, blooming from spring through fall. This groundcover has a shallow root system so it is ideal for around tree roots or to complement rock outcroppings where soil depth is limited.

Hearts and Flowers is a tidy groundcover that is easy to care for and perfect for container gardening. It is easily grown from cuttings, and will usually develop roots within three weeks. It looks best when paired with other desert loving plants such as Century Plant (*Agave americana*), Golden Barrel (*Echinocactus grusonii*), and Mexican Bird of Paradise (*Caesalpinia mexicana*).

Photo of the Month



Cliffs at Walker Lake
Walker Lake, Nevada
Dave Buum