



Art in the Montessori Environment

From Montessori Services

"If we try to think back to the dim and distant past... what is it that helps us reconstruct those times, and to picture the lives of those who lived in them? It is their art... It is thanks to the hand, the companion of the mind, that civilization has arisen."
—Maria Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*

Art is one of the many ways children express themselves. Art is a way for children to communicate their feelings. It is through art that children develop their fine motor skills. In the Montessori environment, we provide open-ended art activities that help children explore and use their creativity.

When it comes to art, it is the *process* not the product that is important to the child. As adults, our goal is to produce a product. The child interacts with the world differently. The child works to develop self. The focus is on the process not the product. Once a child creates something, he does not feel the need to keep the product. It is the process that gives him satisfaction and inner joy.

Embrace Messy Play, Mama [and Dad] —it builds confidence and problem-solving skills

From [motherly.com](https://www.motherly.com), written by Rebecca Eanes

As I carried a large plastic bin filled to the top with water through my hallway, drops splashed around my feet. I made a mental note to wipe it up when I came back through—my thousandth mental note of the morning—and I continued toward the towel I'd spread out on the kitchen floor.

The towel was there to contain some of the mess I knew was coming. I carefully set the bin on the towel, and immediately it transformed into a large lake teeming with sea creatures thanks to the imagination of a little boy.

In went toy boats and toy animals, toy villains and toy heroes, and they all made quite a splash. My son chattered on as he acted out the scene, and water soon soaked the towel and seeped onto the floor all around the bin. Something beautiful was happening on this very ordinary day on my wet kitchen floor as the sound of play echoed through my home.

A happy memory was being made. Joy was present, as it often is, alongside the messes our children make.

I can recall many such instances that I now look back on fondly. Cloud dough tracks across our tables, piles of Lego bricks dumped on the floor, paint that missed the paper it was intended for, and so many other messes actually were evidence of creativity and happiness. Of course, I didn't always see them that way, though I did try to often.

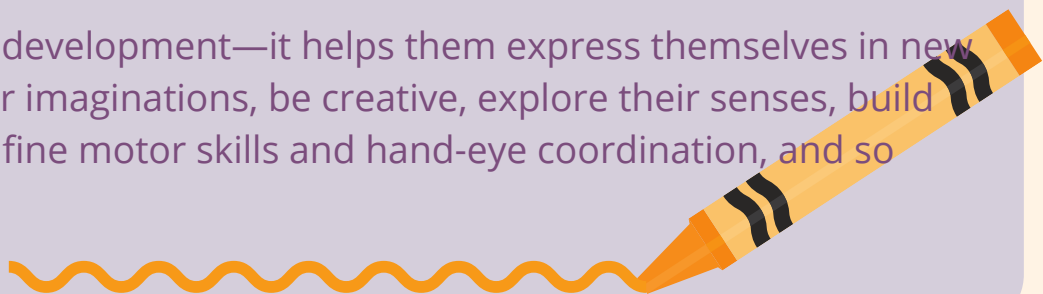
There were times when the messes made me feel irritated or anxious, but all in all, the benefits of the messes far outweighed the trouble of cleaning them up. Many of my fondest memories were made among the mess.

So, to the mama [and father] who feels exasperated by another mess your little one has made today, I want to offer you this perspective from a mom who misses it now: try to pause and see the magic in the mess.

Note the joy on their faces and really hear the sound of their laughter. Watch in awe as their imaginations run wild and their creativity unfolds. They aren't little for long, though it may seem to be dragging on slowly now. My mother-in-law always told me that she'd trade her now clean and quiet house for the loud and messy chaos of little children any day. And now I completely understand why.

This is not to say that it isn't difficult. I know you're exhausted. You're tired of cleaning up. You're longing for some quiet order. I also know that sometimes a small shift in perspective is all it takes to get through one more day or to feel a little more joy. A change in how you see your circumstances can allow you to fully embrace the beautiful season that you are in because soon, a new season will come. That is motherhood.

Messy play is good for a child's development—it helps them express themselves in new ways. It allows them to use their imaginations, be creative, explore their senses, build problem-solving skills, work on fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination, and so much more!



Messy play can also help calm anxiety in some children and help regulate their emotions, building confidence along the way.

Sky's the limit with cloud dough

They loved to use their construction vehicles to scoop, dump, and move it around, and they enjoyed using various molds to make people, animals, and bricks. I used this two-ingredient recipe from Happy Hooligans. Mix eight cups of flour with one cup of baby oil and mix with a whisk or spoon.

Ooey gooey slime

In one container, mix 4-ounces of white glue with one-half cup of water. Add food coloring if desired. In a separate container, mix one cup of water with one teaspoon of Borax powder. Slowly stir glue mixture into the Borax solution. Knead to a proper consistency. (Kristen gives a great alternative below if slime is too messy for you!)

Edible homemade finger-paint

Put two tablespoons of sugar into a saucepan, add one-third cup of flour and two cups of water. Whisk until smooth and stir until mixture thickens. Pour into small cups and mix in food coloring as desired. Let it cool completely!

There's magic in a simple bin of rice or beans

As toddlers, my boys used to love to play in a big bin of uncooked beans or rice. I'd give them plenty of large spoons, cups, and bowls for scooping and pouring—favorite toddler activities—and they'd play for quite a long time. Thankfully, both are easy to sweep up!

A final note on messes and art from Leslie: Montessori art projects are typically open-ended to allow for creativity and self expression (think finger painting vs. a step by step craft). While I agree that children should be allowed to get messy and make a mess, I understand that you might not want a GIANT mess every day. In the classroom, we only put out as much material as a child can clean up (mostly) independently. For example, we might put out a few very small containers of paint. Or a small container with glue and a paintbrush or a glue stick. Then refill as needed. We don't provide the entire bottle of paint or glue. And we always have a mop, towels, and the table scrubbing job available for independent clean up. Toddlers might need assistance cleaning up sometimes, but they learn quickly. And if it's a big messy project that requires adult guidance to clean up, they can still be involved and help! You can also always take art and sensory projects in the yard or on the deck and get a dose of sunshine!

Montessori MacGyver Clothespin Paint Brushes *by Rachel*

There are some of those true Montessori materials we just cannot re-create, but if we look around our house, there are plenty of things we can turn into Montessori materials for our children! In this series, we'll walk you through a step by step process of making your own materials from items found around your house! Recycle & Reuse! Get your child involved in the making process for more at-home fun!

Clothespin Paint Brushes: Language, Fine Motor Skill Work

Items You Will Need:

- Variety of items from around the house (Cotton balls, leaves, tin foil, bits of fabric, etc.)
- 5-10 clothespins or chip/binder clips
- Paper and paint

How to Make It:

1. Search for a variety of items to make paint brushes and use clothespins to act as the handles.
2. Be sure to use things that are easily washed or disposable.

How to set up:

Remember, all of our work in the classroom is set up from left to right to mimic the way we read from left to right. So, place the homemade paintbrushes on the left side of the tray, the paper in the middle, and the paint at the top of the tray. Use one paint color at a time with a different homemade paint brush to see the various textures!



Step Away from the Slime!!! The Moon Sand Experiment

by Kristen

Slime is a sensitive subject in our home! Art is encouraged for my girls as they have an inspiring space to form something new and valuable. The innovative space has a giant table, utensils, equipment, paper and a plethora of creative objects! Slime has been formed in this great place but it is one tactile project that has been tumultuous! It was a huge hit in my house for what seemed like years and years and years.... At first, the girls needed my help making slime but then they got older and more capable and they began to “experiment” with lotions, beads and any liquid they could add to the slime. It was all good until the slime migrated to the bedroom! It would get stuck in their duvet cover or squished in the carpet of our home that was on the market! For my sanity and to still be a supportive mom, I needed another option. The option needed to be able to encourage and satisfy their need for something squishy as they seemed to worship slime as though it had magical powers! In searching for a remedy recipe for slime, I found “Moon Sand”! The girls could make it like they did the slime but is was not as sticky and the texture is more like sand. The original making of the Moon Sand is a bit messy but utilizing it in the future it is much like kinetic sand.

Art can be fun, creative, and messy! I love the fun and creative aspect but I try to make it more of a sensory experience for my children at home! I hope Moon Sand will provide amusement for your children during this time we are hunkering down at home! Have fun!

Materials:

- 4 cups of cornmeal (white or yellow both work, bu you can add food coloring to white to change the color)
- 2 cups of cornstarch
- 10 tablespoons of vegetable oil
- 1/16 - 1/8 teaspoon of food coloring
- 2 bowls
- Measuring cups
- Tablespoon and teaspoons

Process

1. Combine 4 cups of cornmeal and 2 cups of cornstarch in a bowl.
2. Measure 10 tablespoons of vegetable oil into a separate bowl. If coloring the moon sand, add the food coloring to the oil mixture. Mix well.
3. Add oil to dry ingredients and knead the mixture until it is mixed well.
4. Moon sand should be mold-able. It will easily roll into and hold a ball shape. It is crumbly when not compacted.
5. Store in an airtight container. It should last a few months but it is perishable.

Trouble shooting

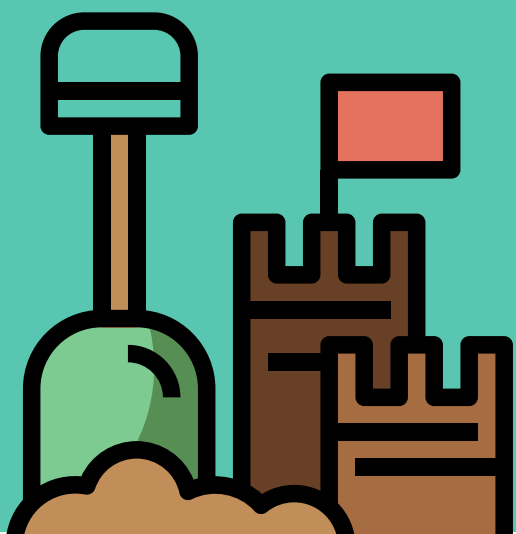
It is crumbly but should form a firm ball shape. If it does not form a ball, add more oil, 1 tablespoon at a time. Mix well. If it is too wet, add cornmeal or cornstarch $\frac{1}{4}$ cup at a time and mix well.

Options/Variations

Add scoops, spoons, and other small kitchen utensils to allow for making shapes and molds. Use small animal objects.



Photo Credit: 150 Screen-Free Activities for Kids



Bathtub Paint Two Ways

Option A: Shaving Cream Bathtub Paint from momdot.com

Materials:

- Shaving cream
- Food coloring
- Muffin tin (or other separated container/tray)
- Paint brushes

Procedure:

1. Fill up a muffin tin with a few squirts of shaving cream
2. Add a few drops of food coloring and stir
3. Play in the tub!



Option B: Bathtub Paint with Soap from modernlymorgan.com

Materials:

- 1/2 cup of Johnson's Baby Head to Toe Wash or similar baby wash
- 1/2 cup of corn starch
- 2 tablespoons of water food coloring
- Some kind of divided tray
- Paint brushes

Procedure

1. In a medium bowl, mix baby wash and corn starch together.
2. Add in water. If you think the consistency is still too thick, feel free to add more water. You want it to be thick enough to stick to the walls/not too runny.
3. Take your tray and evenly distribute the mixture into the compartments.
4. Use 1-2 drops of food coloring to create different colors.
5. Now start the bath and grab those paint brushes - you're ready to let your little one paint. Have fun!



Caterpillar Update from Rachel



"The caterpillars are getting bigger each and every day, just like you toddlers! In the next couple of days, they will gather at the top of the cup and form a chrysalis around themselves and start the process of metamorphosis, or the process of transformation from caterpillar to butterfly.

So cool! I will send a photo as soon as we have chrysalises!"



Egg Carton Caterpillars

by Kristen

Materials

- Cardboard egg carton
- Googley eyes
- Paint or markers
- Pipe cleaners
- Scissors (for adult)
- Place mat
- Glue or tape



Procedure

1. Cut an egg carton in half.
2. Set up a tray or place mat with all of the above materials.
3. Invite your child to come sit with you at a table.
4. Have your child paint the egg carton.
5. While the egg carton is drying, cut the pipe cleaners for the legs and antennae.
6. Glue or draw the eyes on.
7. Poke holes in the sides for the legs and then on the top front for the antennae.
8. Attach the legs and antenna by make a small knot and then putting through the holes.
9. Have Fun!

Options/Variations

Use different materials like markers, watercolors, or crayons to color the caterpillar. Draw on the eyes. Use material from your recycle bin to create. Gather small rocks, use a glue gun to attach together to make a "garden caterpillar." Use small twigs for the legs. Read "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" By Eric Carle before creating your own caterpillar.

