



## MUD KITCHENS

Jan White a specialist in Early childhood outdoor provision from birth to five, has been working in collaboration with Liz Knowles a former environment educator and Forest School trainer. They have set up an initiative which aims to deepen the understanding, importance, value and range of experiences from mud play as Continuous provision and support practitioners to achieve this.

### **Guidelines for Creating a Mud Kitchen.**

**Mixing** soil, water and a range of other materials forms a foundation role in early childhood which has deep importance for well being, development and learning.

**Mud kitchens** provide something quite different to a soil digging patch. A mud kitchen includes elements from familiar role play home corner which are then enhanced by being outside. Mud kitchens do not need to be fancy and do not cost much. The most important part of a mud kitchen is that they are made with the children who will be using them.

**The kitchen** needs easy accessible supply of basic materials, they need to have walls, fences or other vertical surfaces to allow for hanging utensils and pots. A corner will make the area feel more room like. A water supply is essential, which does not have to be near by, as children love to fill, and transport containers to the kitchen. A variety of collecting containers and if possible a tap with running water.

Gravel, pebbles and other **natural resources** need to be made available and plant materials – children need to understand that they need permission to pick and gather. So a set of agreed rules need to be discussed before using the mud kitchen.

Your **mud kitchen** needs to be big enough for several children and it needs to be easy to get in and out of , to work and sit in and it needs to interact with whatever else is happening in the outside area.

**Work surfaces** are crucial, hooks, baskets that can separate types of utensils. Also a place to put all the old mixed material!!

**Add** an old cupboard or two, work top, cooker, microwave, shelving, pots, pans, jugs, funnels, bakeware, utensils and plenty of bowls and containers. Jelly moulds/ice cube trays.

You may want to add some **enhancements** for special occasions, food colours, herbs, spices, chalk to grind and mix. Then you will need a big washing up bowl for clearing up.

**Search**, charity shops, second hand shops, ask for donations, furniture re cycling centres for a range of interesting resources to set up and extend your mud kitchen.

**Skills for children** include, filling, pouring, emptying, transferring, mixing, stirring, whisking, frothing, scooping, ladling, moulding, patting, smoothing, mark making, throwing, splatting, splashing, sharing out, serving, foraging, picking, collecting, shredding, crushing, mashing, measuring, separating and the list goes on. The range of potential experiences include, sorting, classifying, cooking, transforming, creating, testing, repeating, experimenting, naming, labelling, decorating etc.

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). A rich opportunity to develop Personal Social and Emotional Development, and Communication and Language.

**Adults** need to facilitate and enable. Observe, understand and respond sensitively. Supply useful language and encourage children to make links in their learning. Pose scenarios, ask open ended questions, consider cause and effect and predicting skills. 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).

**Consider** why the experience matters and then manage to make it available a benefit-risk attitude rather than a risk-benefit assessment. Managing Risk in Play Provision – download from the Play England website.

**Why dirt is good**, use soil purchased from garden centres rather than what is already outside, a loam topsoil. Handwashing is important after playing in the mud kitchen, again rules and routines need to be agreed and adhered to. The children can first wash up their pots etc in warm soapy water. The best risk management processes involve the children as a core control measure. Introduce new resources carefully and slowly. Emphasise how to use them safely and effectively. Less is always more!

**Involve the children** in noticing dangers and how these situations could be prevented. All equipment needs to be looked after, washed and dried, storing on sacking or in wire baskets is best.

***Making a Mud Kitchen by Jan White    [www.muddyfaces.co.uk](http://www.muddyfaces.co.uk)***

