



Back to 'āina

Foster your child's connection to nature

Did you know...

Regular free play in nature helps children:

- Have lower stress levels and stronger immune systems
- Have more active imaginations and play more creatively
- Become fitter and leaner
- Experience fewer symptoms of ADD and ADHD
- Have greater respect for themselves, for others, and for the environment

Help your child to discover a sense of wonder with nature. Playing and learning outside is good for your child and for the environment!

Here are some simple activities to get you started:

■ **Commit to a daily Green Hour.** The National Wildlife Federation recommends that parents give their kids a “Green Hour” every day, a time for unstructured play and interaction with the natural world. This can take place in a garden, a backyard, the park down the street, or any place that provides safe and accessible green spaces where children can learn and play. www.green-hour.org

■ **Play “Old school” games together.** Show your kids how to play these low-tech, classic games: hide and seek, hopscotch, Chinese jump rope, frisbee, kick-ball, tag, four square, hide and seek and more. Your child will appreciate any kind of play-time with you.

■ **Hold an eco-scavenger hunt.** Some ideas: a feather, a seed, a smooth rock, a red flower, a snail trail. Let your child come up with things to find too!

■ **Start a family nature club!** Gather friends and families from your community to spend time in nature together. For ideas on starting a club, go to www.childrenandnature.org/natureclubs. Kids can start their own clubs too!



■ **Stargaze together.** Wish on stars and learn the constellations. Have the children name their own constellations by connecting the dots to create shapes and pictures! For older children, stay up late together and track the movement of constellations through the night sky.

■ **Go for a hike or explore a tide pool.** Get to know what's special about your island environment while getting some exercise together. Talk about the ways our environment provides for us, and how our behaviors impact the land and sea. Take your trash with you and pick up litter to leave the place better off than you found it.

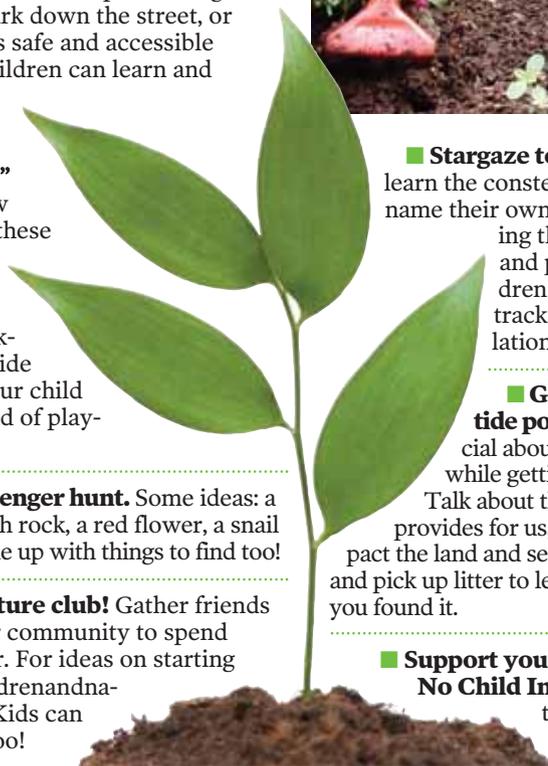
■ **Support your child's school to Leave No Child Inside.** Start a garden, mentor an environmental club, encourage environmental

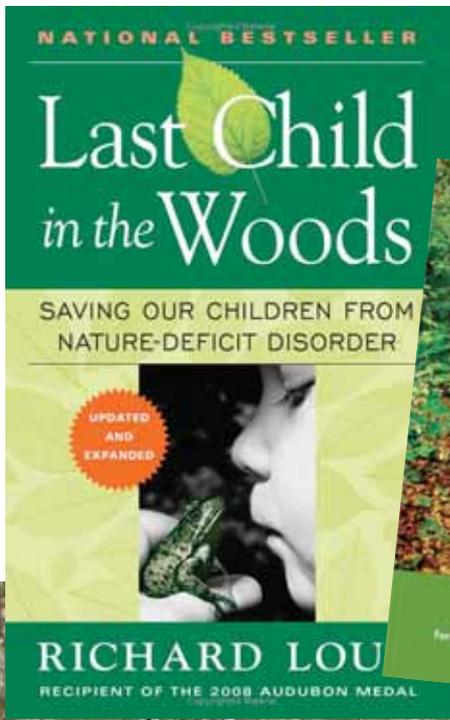
field trips. Parent volunteers are critical to the success of these programs. Talk about it with school staff and other parents and learn more at: www.koahawaii.org, www.nochildleftinside.org

■ **Volunteer for nature!** Develop your own service project as a family, or join an environmental non-profit with their work. Find opportunities at www.malahawaii.org and www.volunteerhawaii.org.

■ **Read and seek.** Check out nature books from the library, then go outside to make “real world” observations about what you read together.

■ **Take a walk in the clouds.** Observe changes in the weather and distinguish different types of clouds. Look for shapes in the clouds – maybe you'll see a face, a dog, or a poi pounder – the possibilities are endless! Download a free booklet with activities and info on clouds and the weather at www.takeawalk.com.



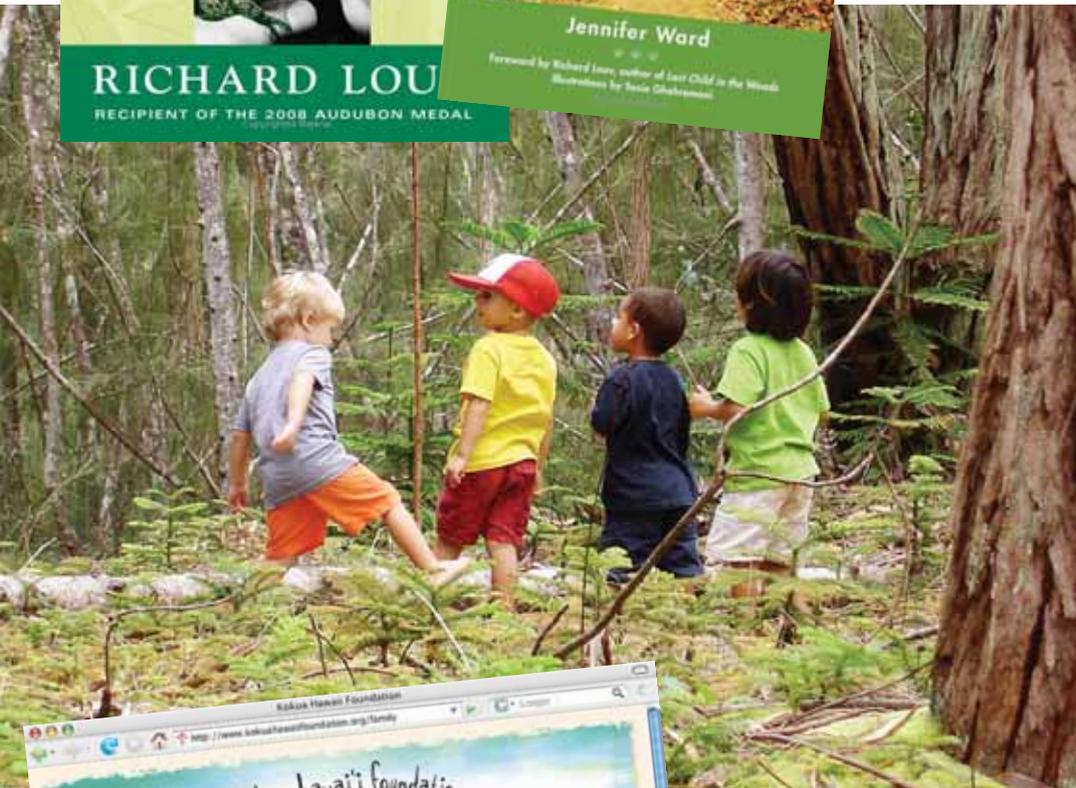
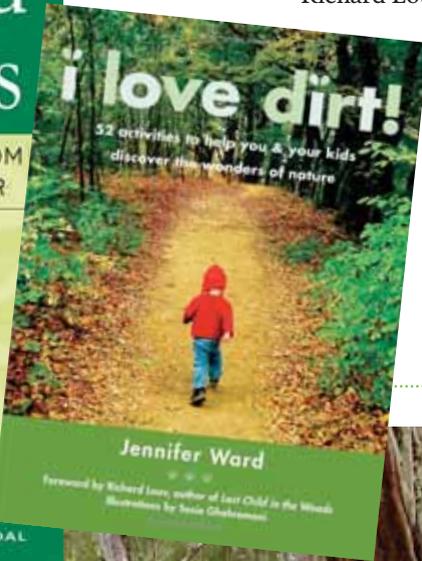


Check out these books for more ideas:

■ **Last Child Left in the Woods:** saving our children from nature-deficit disorder by Richard Louv.

■ **I Love Dirt:** 52 Activities to help you & your kids discover the wonders of nature by Jennifer Ward.

Both of these books are available at local bookstores and through the Hawai'i public library system.



What is Nature-Deficit Disorder?

In his 2005 book, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*, Richard Louv defines the term nature-deficit disorder.

“Nature deficit disorder is not an official diagnosis but a way of viewing the problem, and describes the human costs of alienation from nature, among them: diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties, and higher rates of physical and emotional illnesses. The disorder can be detected in individuals, families, and communities.”

In 2006, under Louv's leadership, the Children & Nature Network (C&NN) launched a nationwide campaign to “Leave No Child Inside.” For the past few years, conservation, education, health and government organizations have been working together to find ways to reconnect children and nature.

Start some Leave No Child Inside initiatives in your own community!

- Insist that environmental education be taught in your child's school. Create outdoor experiential learning outside of school.
- Get involved in citizen science: whale watching for NOAA, water quality testing, etc.
- Support scouting organizations, 4-H clubs and other outdoor programs.
- Promote the annual Take Your Child Outside Week www.takeachildoutside.org.
- Support local nature centers and nature preserves. Help get children involved in wildlife habitat restoration programs.
- Green your city. Push for better urban planning, more natural parks and walkable neighborhoods. Invest in land-trust movements.
- Allow kids to build forts, tree houses or plant gardens. If your neighborhood or development prohibits it, challenge the restrictions or covenants that discourage natural play.



Links:

- www.kokuahawaii-foundation.org/family
- www.childrenandnature.org
- www.takeachildoutside.org

The Kokua Hawai'i Foundation is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization supporting environmental education in Hawai'i's schools and communities.

Learn about our programs and subscribe to our newsletter at www.kokuahawaiiifoundation.org.

