

# SOIL TREE PICTURES

What paints and paint brushes can you find in nature and how do you paint with them?

**Goal:** Children will try a non-traditional type of painting with soil's different colours. This will increase their sensitivity to natural colours and shapes. They will experience creating in nature using materials and colours created by nature. Painting with natural colours can be a pleasant activity for children's relaxation time.

**How long:** 15–60 minutes

**Who:** 4–99

**Where:** A place with trees or shrubs

**When:** All year round (start ideally in the warm part of the year and then at any time when the soil is not frozen)

**You need:** Containers for soil, water, paper, twigs and/or paint brushes and (optionally) pads, string and clothes pegs



## 1. SEARCH FOR NATURAL COLOURS

The first step is to have the children look for different colours around the bases of some trees. What shades do you see? What can you find in nature to draw with if you had no crayons or chinks on hand? What do you feel like painting amidst the trees at this moment? What parts of trees do you want to draw? What shapes and colours do you need for drawing?

## 2. PALETTE COLLECTION

The children should be shown how to gently take soil samples of each of the different colours they have found (black or brown earth, rusty or brownish shades of clay, light sandy soil, grey gravel etc.). You need to collect just small samples from places where the trees and any other plants or animals won't miss it. Mix the soil samples with water in containers to form thick slurries. It is a good idea to show the children that it is better to add water gradually. It should be possible to have a whole range of colours from which you can create a shared palette to make art with.

*TIP: There is a more demanding procedure to achieve very nice natural soil paints that make it possible to colour not only paper but also ceramics, wood or canvas. You make a pigment from the soil and connect it with a binder. You will need to collect different coloured soil samples to get different shades. Let the soil dry out, ideally for a few weeks, then sift it through coarse, then finer sieves until you get the finest dust by sifting through a coarse cloth or a special sieve. Use some of this powdered pigment to make a coloured paste when you want to paint. Mix the paste in a ratio of 1:1 with a binder and you can start painting. You may use casein glue or egg yolk as a binder. This is made by mixing an egg yolk with water in a ratio of 1:2. Mix the egg binder with the pigment paste. You may use clove oil as a preservative. Store the pigment in powder form and always make fresh paint for each new painting session.*

### 3. PAINT BRUSHES

Now is the time to prepare the paint brushes when the colours are ready. You can just grab some paintbrushes as you head out if you lack the time but it is always better to make your own out in the field. Children can try painting with a simple twig, see how great it feels to paint with their fingers, or learn to make their own brushes with natural materials. Try your new paint brushes and how they paint on a scrap piece of paper.

**TIP:** When making brushes from natural items it is useful to show children the production process (e.g. we tie a bunch of grass, a dry flower, a pine cone etc. onto a twig). Again, it is useful to remind them about the rule for responsible collecting.

### 4. MY PICTURE

Everything is now ready for creating art so everyone walks around the trees to find their spots and subjects for painting. The children can paint directly on tree trunks if there are trees in the vicinity with smooth bark like beech, hornbeam or birch and it is also possible to paint on stumps or dry fallen wood. The children are not expected to paint the whole trunk of their tree but just a small area will be enough. They can either paint ornaments, real places, whole landscapes, trees, or they can be shown some of the tree's beautiful details (bark, roots, stumps, leaves, etc.). Some children will prefer to paint their fantasies, fictional shapes or ideas. There should be no specific common subject, only the theme: MY TIME AMONG THE TREES.

*TIP: Children can still paint if there are no suitable trees nearby. Any surface (pavements, wooden terraces, or pieces of wood, etc.) can become a canvas.*

*TIP: Some children might work better in a group on one big common picture. Encourage them to do so they can experience being creative in nature as part of an artistic team.*

*TIP: If the children are having fun making art outdoors, they can have a go at stamping. Prepare soil goo and then dip various natural materials into it and stamp them on paper. That is how lovely ornaments, forms, and graphics can be made. Children can also make original wrapping paper by stamping with natural products. Just bring larger sheets of paper or plain wrapping paper with you.*

### 5. SOIL PICTURE GALLERY

Whoever is done can add their painting to a common outdoor „soil picture gallery“. It is great to add titles to the images but it is not necessary. You can make the gallery by tying a line or a string between a couple of trees. When everyone is done, walk through the gallery together. You can stop at the individual paintings and talk about what each child sees there, how the paintings were made, etc. You can discuss how it felt to work with soil paints and what and when everyone will paint again. Discuss how it felt to work with soil paints and talk about what everyone would be interested in painting next time and when.

*TIP: If time allows you can invite other visitors to your picture gallery (parents, other classes, passers-by, etc.). The gallery could be hung on the school / kindergarten fence for an impromptu art show.*

## EVALUATION OF THE ACTIVITY'S GOAL (EVIDENCE OF LEARNING)

- The children found different colours and forms in nature.
- They collected different colour samples and made their own soil paints.
- The children painted their pictures using natural soil paints.
- Painting with natural materials provided a pleasant creative time for the children.

