

Barbara Dowling: Leaves are an element in nature that are always interesting to children. They can easily be collected and observed, and there are multiple facets of leaves that can be explored. Collecting leaves can be done as a group activity and as an extended family activity. You can also use the internet to connect to other Head Start programs in your city or state to engage in a leaf exchange to expand the local collections.

With so many different colors, textures, sizes, and shapes, leaves offer many opportunities for children to practice their observation skills -- to look closely at the leaves to see that some have smooth edges, some have points, some are found in groups, and some are found alone. Can collecting and observing leaves grow into a project? Sure...

...if you can answer "Yes" to a few questions. Have the children shown an interest in and a curiosity about leaves? Where will this investigation of leaves potentially take us in terms of knowledge and skills? Can it offer -- offer opportunities for deep learning? And will it promote the development of fundamental skills and concepts to increase children's scientific ideas?

If you have answered these questions and you want to move forward, you can begin by noting what questions the children have asked and what observations have they already made about leaves while collecting them. Listen closely. You will hear them say, "Do they make leaves make noise? When and why? As trees grow taller do the leaves get bigger? Are leaves and needles the same thing?"

And why do some leaves fall off the trees? Look! These leaves have smooth edges and these are pointy. Why is that?"
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