

FUN BACKYARD GAMES

Bean Bag Toss

Make an easy Bean Bag Toss using a double layer of poster board glued together and a large box. Use the large box as a base, and attach the poster board to one side of it. Before attaching the poster board, paint a design on it, allowing for one or more holes. We never kept score, but the kids had a lot of fun throwing those bean bags. They're easy to make from fabric scraps if you sew. Get the kids to help.

Scavenger Hunt

Hide items in yard and have the kids try to find them. This can be as easy or elaborate as you chose. Rather than encouraging competitiveness, have the children work together to find all the items.

Duck, Duck, Goose

Don't forget this classic although you need at least five friends to make this game a lot of fun. Sit in a circle and have one child walk around patting each child on the head saying, "Duck, duck, duck" and finally "goose." The child deemed "goose" stands up and runs around the circle in the opposite direction from the other child. Whoever gets back to the spot and sits down first wins the spot and the other child starts again with the "Duck, duck, goose."

Simon Says

An oldie but a goodie. If your child has a favorite character, substitute "Simon" with a character from the theme. Children should listen carefully and only do what "Simon" says.

Charades

Give a child the theme or group of animals then have them act out what the animal does. You and the kids can try to guess the name of the animal.

Freeze Tag

One child is chosen as being "it." The chosen child tags the other children by catching up to them and touching them. Once tagged, the child must remain frozen until another free child goes through their legs. When all the children are frozen (except the one who was chosen as being "it") with no one to set them free the game is over and you can start again.

Balloon Bust Relay

Purchase large balloons, stuff with a prize such as a whistle, then inflate and tie. You will need one balloon for player. Divide children into two teams and place each team behind the start line. At the other end of the room are the balloons. On your mark a child from each team runs to the other end of the room, grabs a balloon and sits on it, bounces on it, lays on it, anything they can do to make it pop. When the balloon pops they collect their prize and run back to their teammates. The game continues until every child has retrieved their prize. If one team falls behind parents are allowed to help. Make sure you've got the movie camera rolling; you won't want to miss the action or the expressions. If you don't have time for a relay yell, "GO" and let every child grab a balloon at the same time and try to pop it. Make sure to carefully clean up the balloon remains, as they are choke hazards for young children.

Wits and Consequences

Blow up balloons with questions, written on strips of paper, inside and place balloons in Bag "A". Let each guest reach in and pull out a balloon on their turn. If they answer correctly they stay in the game for another 'round, if they answer incorrectly they pull a balloon out of Bag "B", pop it and have to do what it says..."Rub your tummy and pat your head at the same time", "Strut and cluck like a chicken three times". If they complete their task they can return to the game. If not they can cheer on the remaining players. When all the questions have been answered the games over. Make sure to carefully clean up the balloon remains, as they are choke hazards for young children.

Chalk It Up To Fun

An inexpensive box of colored chalk can keep the kids busy for hours. Have younger kids draw pictures on the sidewalk or driveway. For the older children, try a game of Tic Tac Toe or hopscotch: draw a hopscotch pattern with eight squares. Players toss a marker (try a stone or button) into a square and then hop over it on one foot.

Bug Races

See how many critters the kids can spot—without actually picking them up—in the backyard for a short time period, such as five minutes, says Penny Warner, author of *Kids Outdoor Parties* (Meadowbrook Press). "Add up how many bugs they see and give them a sketch pad to sketch as many as they can. Then have them share their artwork."

Backyard Bowling

Find household items that will tumble over easily, such as empty cereal boxes, empty soda cans and small stuffed toys and align them in a row like bowling pins, suggests Warner. Then, using a smaller ball for older kids and a bigger ball for the young ones, have the children roll the ball. They score a point for each object they knock down.

Kick the Can

A variation on Hide and Seek, this game works best with at least three kids. One person is designated "it" and will guard the "can" (an empty coffee can or ball) which is set in an open space. While the other players hide, the "it" counts to 20 (or higher) and then tries to find and tag the other players. If captured, players must go to "jail". Any player who hasn't been caught can run in and kick the can, setting all of the captured players free. If the "it" finds everyone, he wins the game.

Outdoor Canvas

Hang an old sheet on a clothesline or tape paper to a fence for your budding artist to paint on. Encourage them to try painting with different kinds of brushes, says Warner. "Try dipping grass into paint and swishing it on paper, then try painting with a leaf or a twig. The kids can also try painting rocks and creating little people or bugs with them."

Mini-Olympics

Get the kids competing in running and wheelbarrow races, obstacle courses, water balloon tosses and jumping competitions, suggests Hall. Finish off the fun with a mini-Olympic awards ceremony to honour all of the athletes. Buy medals at the local dollar store or make your own with construction paper, coloured pencils and string.

Find the Bacon

Divide kids into two different teams. Each team gets a strip of fabric. If you have a huge outdoor area, use one yard of fabric for the whole game. You can also vary the game by having Team 1 use the front yard and Team 2 uses the back yard. Teams get five minutes to hide the bacon in their section of the yard. Spies and lookouts, to spot and capture the spies, are established. The object of the game is to get the other team's bacon (flag) without being captured by the other team. If tagged, the child is imprisoned but can be freed by a teammate. Playing this game at night adds a whole new dimension!

Red Light Green Light

Select one child, or perhaps yourself, to start the game and be the stoplight. All the children line up on the other side of the yard or field. The designated stoplight yells "Green light!" and the children lined up start running. The first one to make it to the stoplight wins and is now the stoplight. It gets tricky when the stoplight changes, though. The stoplight should yell "Red light!" to get children to stop. Any movement by a child means she is sent back to the beginning. The stoplight can also call out "yellow light" which means the children can only walk very slowly. Variations to this game include yelling "red light" two times in a row, or adding body movements. Say "green light" with your arms up one time and then say "red light," but throw your arms up again to confuse runners into thinking your body language says "green light."

Body Part Freeze Tag

Body part freeze tag is just like regular freeze tag except once tagged, you are not completely frozen. Select one or two children to be "it." These children run around tagging other children. If a child is tagged on the arm, only the arm is frozen. If tagged on the leg, only the leg is frozen, so the child must hop on one leg. If both legs are tagged, the child can pull himself along the ground with arms (assuming they weren't already tagged). The object is to completely freeze as many as possible. Others can unfreeze body parts as well.

Dare Tag

This game requires a relatively large yard and a large group of children (perhaps twenty or so). Children are divided into two teams. You can name them if you want: Cops and Robbers, Cowboys and Indians, etc. Divide the field into thirds. The section in the middle is actually the dare zone. Each team starts by lining up at the front of their safe zone along the lines bordering the safe zone. The object of the game is to capture as many from the other team as possible by walking into the dare zone and hoping someone from the other team will step out of her safe zone to get you. If the first darer can make it back to his own safe zone then the opponent (the one chasing him) will be captured by his team members. You can either have the captured children be prisoners who can be freed by their own team members if they can make it, or have the captured switch sides.

Flashlight Tag

This game is actually a hide-and-seek game played at night. There are many variations, but one is where one child is "it." He waits near the "jail" and counts off to 50. Children hide and at the end of the count "it" starts his search. If he shines his light on someone they may not run away. The "it" child needs to call out who it is. If he gets it right, then that child has to go to jail. The child who is it cannot hide or turn off his flashlight. Another version is to have teams. One team searches for the other and as "victims" are found and identified, they are sent to jail. Teammates can be freed by other members of their own team. But don't get caught. If someone misidentifies a person, that child gets to run off and hide elsewhere.

Prisoner of War

Children are divided into teams. They each select one child from each team to be the prisoner of the other team and the two prisoners are placed in jail. This can be a designated area or a chalk box. The teams each line up and the object of the game is to free the prisoner from the other team. The teams must get to the prison by going to the other team's side to free the prisoner. If tagged, that child then becomes a prisoner too and must go to jail. If a child makes it to jail, however, he or she is safe as long as he is inside the prison. The rescuer can only rescue one person at a time and can choose the right time to "break for it."

Red Devil

This game combines guessing, running and racing for a true winner, but it does require a large building, such as a house. One child is the Red Devil, and the other children line up in front of the building. The Red Devil thinks of an object (anything at all), and the children take turns trying to guess what the object is.

When someone guesses right, that child and the Red Devil must race around the building in opposite directions. The first one back to the group joins the group, and the other becomes the Red Devil.

Duck, Duck, Goose

A variation of Red Devil removes the need for a house. Children sit in a large circle on the floor, with one child as the caller walking around the outside of the circle. As the caller walks, she taps each sitting child on the head, calling out, "duck, duck, duck..." When she calls, "Goose," instead of "duck," that child must race the caller around the circle in opposite directions back to the empty spot. Whoever reaches the spot last becomes the new caller.

What Time Is It, Mr. Wolf?

This game is fast-paced and great for a larger group. One child is Mr. Wolf and stands against the wall with her back to the room. The rest of the children line up on the opposing wall. The children ask in unison, "What time is it, Mr. Wolf?" Mr. Wolf gives a time, such as 5 o'clock, and the children take that many steps towards Mr. Wolf. Eventually, Mr. Wolf answers, "Lunchtime," and turns to chase the children back to the wall. Any child who gets tagged before reaching the wall becomes a Wolf as well. The balance of the game soon shifts, with all children becoming Wolves.

Guess Your Friend

For this kids' outdoor game, make sure the terrain is flat and there are no trip hazards. Blindfold all children, set them a distance apart from each other, spin them around, and then turn them loose. They must find their friends, link arms, and then find the rest of their friends. They will have a good time shuffling around and bumping into each other!