



# What is a Natural play space?

**A natural play space allows children to explore their immediate world through being together and playing together in a naturalised setting: a play landscape where plants and trees provide the background for physical and creative challenges and fun.**

Lack of access to wilder places and a generation of 'latchkey' children, have created a vacuum where many traditional outdoor games and exploratory ramblings have largely disappeared - replaced with amusements usually taking place inside the home.

For the 7 to 12 year old child a natural play space will be a few well chosen items of equipment...linked with grassy mounds, paths, forts, beds of bushes and trees, and so on. For the toddler and young child, a more benign landscape with swings, sand and digging, balancing and climbing, rolling etc can be placed among a well designed landscape/garden that encourages community members to linger in the same space. Ownership and better community relations are part of the spirit of the place.

The rigid formality of the wet pour playground is very useful in a restricted urban environment and offers great opportunities for physical challenges...but that is all. This playground is essentially a place where children are taken by their parents/guardians for 20 minutes, and the majority of children do not know each other. As capital investment, the wet pour space is largely past its sell by date in 10 years.

The natural play space is designed for children who know each other,



to play together. Swings, slides, see saws, merry-go-rounds and their modern equivalents are all necessary parts of the natural play area as are running and chasing games, wrestling, hiding, role play...etc. Of course the space must be well designed and it is up to the designer and/or provider to have an affinity with community planning and deliver a product that will encourage this enriching play space to become an important part of our local landscape.



The natural play space encourages a sense of place and beauty; is connected to the local landscape; and



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provides a green backdrop to play. Access to the natural world is the spark that fires the child's creative imagination, and all positive associations with the natural world are formed in the early years. By mixing items of play equipment into a coherent maturing landscape, the child still has all the physical challenges, but now they are blending with the beauty of the naturalised world and the possibility of imaginative freedom is also entering the play space. Does a tree, a bush, a grassy mound have a sell by date? The various items of play equipment can be replaced with time, other play opportunities can evolve....but the underlying sense of place continues to provide growing value to the local community.

Evolve? Yes, the play space is no different from any landscape or garden. Trees grow and change shape, the ambiance also changes, a sense of responsibility comes with a maturing landscape - that this is something to be cherished and enjoyed...and so the features also grow and change: water play, sand, mud, dens, carving, digging, your choice here.



**Capability Brown plus Play = physical and creative freedom for children**



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