Children and nature ...

Much research has been conducted and information published regarding children and nature. Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods*, coined the term “nature deficit disorder” (NDD) to describe the current lack of interaction the majority of today’s children have with nature. It may sound like a medical condition, but it isn’t. It does, however, try to describe some of the impacts this lack of interaction can have.

Many of you may remember playing and exploring in the woods when you were young; catching skinks, frogs, fireflies, and crayfish. Perhaps you had fun trying to see what was making the rustling noises in the leaves or identifying animal footprints or scat (animal droppings). Recent studies have shown that today’s children spend very little time in unorganized outdoor activities. Free-play outdoors has been replaced with television, video games, computers, texting, and extracurricular activities. The increasingly indoor and sedentary lifestyle corresponds to several health issues (such as childhood obesity) and behavioral issues (such as low attention span and poor social skills).

Has it been a long time since you have interacted with nature? Do you have concerns about what your child may interact with if turned loose outdoors? You aren’t alone. In “How to Raise a “Wild” Child and Why You Should!”, Alan Fortesque brings up these concerns and gives some suggestions. Start by going somewhere that you can feel safe about your child exploring. Visit a park, go to a farmers market, or plant a garden. It is important to let the child set the pace. Give him or her a chance to make discoveries, get dirty, and collect “treasures.” The full article is available at:


Other websites:

National Wildlife Federation “Be Out There”
http://www.beoutthere.org/

Education.com Nature Deficit Disorder
http://www.education.com/topic/nature-deficit-disorder/

NC Children and Nature
http://ncchildrenandnature.org
Summer activities for kids (and adults) ...

Scavenger hunt: Have you ever done a scavenger hunt? How about a nature scavenger hunt? This can be a simple, short-term activity or one that lasts the entire summer. Be sure to design the hunt to fit the ages of the children. One easy-to-create scavenger hunt looks for items that fit the alphabet. For example: acorn, bark, clover, and dandelion. Another hunt may be for a specific list of items, such as: three different leaves, three different flowers, and three different seeds. If the children have cameras and like to take pictures, have them “collect” photos of specific items: birds, flowers, butterflies, dragonflies, other insects and bugs, and trees. If they take photos of things they can’t name, some of their indoor time (and rainy days) can be spent looking them up or emailing the photos to someone who may be able to make the identification.

Word searches: Here are three word searches. The children can also create a word list and try making their own word search puzzle. Hint: place the longest words first and try to connect them together. Then start filling in with the shorter words. Each of these puzzles is 13 letters across and 13 letters down.

Word list 1: buffer strip, conserve, fertilize, filter, fish, flow, habitat, lakes, litter, nitrogen, nutrients, oil, phosphorus, pollute, pond, recycle, restore, rivers, runoff, shoreline, toxin, trash, waste, watershed, wetlands

Word list 2: beet, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, collards, corn, cucumbers, eggplant, garlic, greens, herbs, hoe, kale, kohlrabi, leeks, lettuce, melon, okra, onions, parsley, parsnip, peas, plant, radish, rain, ripe, rutabaga, spinach, squash, sweetpotato, tomatoes

Word list 3: beach, clam, crab, crane, dunes, egret, fish, heron, marsh, mussel, oyster, pelican, porpoise, sandcastle, sanddollar, sandpiper, seagull, sea oats, seaturtle, shells, shore line, tern, tide, waves

For more activities, visit:
http://onslow.ces.ncsu.edu/content/EnvedContent
Rain barrels: come build your own or buy one ready-made!

Take advantage of the water nature gives us. Using a rain barrel or cistern to collect rainwater can lower your water bill, be good for your plants, and also protect the environment by reducing runoff from your property.

A Build Your Own Rain Barrel workshop will be held at the Onslow Multipurpose Complex on July 17. Workshop participants will install the hardware for a 55-gallon rain barrel; including brass faucet, overflow pipe, and screened water inlet. The fee for the class and barrel is $35. Ready-made rain barrels will also be available for $45.

Four 1-hr workshop sessions will be offered: 10-11, 11-12, 1-2, and 2-3. Please stop by the Onslow office for Cooperative Extension to reserve your place in a workshop or to order a ready-made barrel. Your reservation can also be made by mailing the bottom of this form, along with the appropriate fee, to the address indicated below. All requests must be received by July 2, 2010. Please call (910) 455-5873 if you have any questions.

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Rain Barrel Workshop – July 17, 2010

Mail to:  NC Cooperative Extension
          Onslow Multipurpose Complex
          4024 Richlands Hwy.
          Jacksonville, NC  28540

Attn:  Rain Barrel Workshop

Time:  _______ 10-11  _______ 11-12  _______ 1-2  _______ 2-3
(Indicate 1st and 2nd workshop time choice)

Name:  _______________________________________________________

Address:  _____________________________________________________

Telephone number:  ___________________________________________

Fee enclosed:  _____ $35 for workshop (includes all supplies to make rain barrel)

  _____ $45 for each “ready-made” rain barrel

(Make checks payable to:  NCCES - Onslow County Center)
Ditches and alligatorweed are two topics that produce a lot of discussion and questions. Let’s begin with ditches. A well-maintained functional ditch will have the proper side slopes for the soil type (see last month’s issue) and be vegetated. This vegetation is usually grass, but it can also be a variety of other plants. The important thing is to have low-maintenance vegetation with roots that stabilize the soil, and that utilize both the water and any nutrients in the water.

It is not a good practice to apply glyphosate or other herbicides to kill all of the vegetation in a ditch. This leads to erosion and unstable banks. Burning ditches also is not a recommended practice. Brush killer can be used to deter trees from growing in the banks, without killing the grass. Be sure to read the label and follow all directions.

If your ditch isn’t draining due to a blockage further down, there are a couple of options. If the blockage is caused by beaver activity, call your county Extension office and ask who to contact about beaver problems. In Onslow, you can call either Bill Norris at Vector Control (455-0181) or Phil Mai (NC Wildlife Control Agent) at 346-8601 or 1-800-551-4418. If the blockage is causing water to back up against a state road, you can contact your local NC Department of Transportation (DOT) office. They may or may not be able to help, depending on the location of the blockage.

If a downstream neighbor causes a blockage by either poorly maintaining or intentionally filling a ditch, you will need to talk to that neighbor. In North Carolina, it is illegal to impede the flow of water off of another person’s property; however, it is a civil case. There is no agency to contact that will pursue this for you.

Before taking the legal path, talk to the neighbor and see what agreement may be reached. One eastern NC community held a ditch cleanout event. The homeowners got together and tackled a long-ignored ditch network in their neighborhood. Residents that were physically unable to do the work were helped by their neighbors; in return, they provided snacks and refreshments for the workers.

That brings us to alligatorweed. Alligatorweed is a highly invasive aquatic plant (it can also grow on land) that spreads through fragmentation. Mowing and weed-whacking alligatorweed in a ditch can result in a small patch becoming a major problem. DO NOT dig out soil containing live alligatorweed roots and place it elsewhere. That will just spread the weed. Alligatorweed can be controlled with several chemicals, including glyphosate, but it will require repeat applications. Alligatorweed has hollow stems, opposite leaves, and a white clover-like flower. If in doubt, take a piece to your local Extension office for identification.

Ditches can become totally blocked with alligatorweed. The weed also makes good habitat for mosquitoes. Please help prevent its spread. For more information or if you have questions, contact me at (910) 455-5873.