

FOOD + HOME/CRAFTS + DIY

Outdoor Arts Ideas and Activities for Creative Kids and Teens

10 ways to create and enjoy art outside as a family this summer

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After cold, cloudy winters, folks in the Pacific Northwest like to take full advantage of our dry, sunny summers. Even if we love the arts, unless the mercury is really soaring, a darkened theater or the galleries of a hermetically sealed museum just aren't as appealing in summertime. Fortunately, families don't have to give up art for the summer. Use this list to spark your creative ideas for appreciating – and participating in – the arts en plein air. The ideas are arranged by age, but don't feel compelled to color inside of the lines: Even the smallest children can surprise you with their artistic sophistication, and creativity brings out the kid in all of us.

All ages

Sidewalk chalk

When your little ones feel like making art, but you want them to go outside, you don't have to spend the day chasing down windblown masterpieces. The whole world (more or less) can be their canvas with [sidewalk chalk](https://www.amazon.com/Non-toxic-Washable-Sidewalk-Colors-Pieces/dp/B075GH4D4P/ref=sr_1_5?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20) (https://www.amazon.com/Non-toxic-Washable-Sidewalk-Colors-Pieces/dp/B075GH4D4P/ref=sr_1_5?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20)! Drawing on sidewalks, fences and even exterior walls gets both bodies and creative juices moving. And it might even pull in the older kids with the opportunity to make large-scale graffiti without getting busted. Take pictures of the best stuff; the next time it rains (or you turn on the hose), the whole process can start over again.

Summer at SAM (free!)

Every day in the summer is a good day to visit the Olympic Sculpture Park. But on Thursday evenings and all day on Saturday throughout the summer, Seattle Art Museum's [Summer at SAM](https://www.seattleartmuseum.org/summer) (<https://www.seattleartmuseum.org/summer>) program hosts a rotating extravaganza of all-ages art events. Kids might be less interested in yoga and Zumba (they are welcome, anyway), but live music, guided beachcombing and collaborative art projects have wide appeal for all age groups.

[1112177815.1682120962&_gl=1*14am5sx*_ga*MTEzMjE3NzgxNS4xNjgyMTIwOTYy*_c](#) doesn't have a filter for outdoor events, but scroll through "story time" search results for the ones with "outdoor" in the title. If your toddler is more interested in the crafts than the story, West Seattle's [Art Nest](https://www.westseattleartnest.com/) (<https://www.westseattleartnest.com/>) offers crafty multiweek toddler playdate sessions in an outdoor tent (for a fee).

Elementary artists

Make a mess (free!)

The great thing about summer is that you can take the [messy art projects](https://www.parentmap.com/article/messiest-coolest-summer-art-projects) (<https://www.parentmap.com/article/messiest-coolest-summer-art-projects>) outside. Kids can blow paint bubbles, free their inner Jackson Pollock without destroying furniture, and tie-dye clothes in tubs outside instead of staining the sink. You can involve nature by using mud and other [natural materials](https://www.dartmouth.edu/dccccc/docs/liz_natural_art_april_2.pdf) (https://www.dartmouth.edu/dccccc/docs/liz_natural_art_april_2.pdf) as the tools or the medium. Blend art, nature and exercise by going on family nature walks that allow kids to forage for art supplies to use in natural-material sculptures and leaf rubbings. Just make sure you have permission to pick the flowers and set some ground rules in advance about what is not okay to pick up – unless you want this to be the summer your kid finally takes up taxidermy.

Outdoor music

If you think music festivals are just for the Coachella crowd, think again. Our region is blessed with a variety of [music festivals](https://www.parentmap.com/article/summer-music-festivals-families-kids-seattle) (<https://www.parentmap.com/article/summer-music-festivals-families-kids-seattle>) that are fun for all ages. Okay, unless your toddler is the type who can nap anywhere, you might hold off for a few years. But for families with school-age kids, there are small fests that specialize in one genre, and big ones with something to suit every taste. Some, like Bumbershoot, add visual as well as performing arts to the musical mix. Music festivals can be pricey, but cities throughout the area host free concerts and other all-ages art events in the parks during summer. You might even discover [Pianos in the Park](https://www.pianosinthepark.com/) (<https://www.pianosinthepark.com/>), where your family can scare the birds with a rousing rendition of "Chopsticks."

Summer camp

Unless your child enrolls in a highly specialized academic or sports camp, nearly every [summer camp](https://www.parentmap.com/article/exciting-camps-and-activities-summer-2023) (<https://www.parentmap.com/article/exciting-camps-and-activities-summer-2023>) blends art and the outdoors to some extent, and quite a few of them specialize in it. It's true that a lot of camps were already filling up back in January, but there are always some with last-minute openings.

For less commitment, look into drop-in workshops and free activities, such as the ones held at [Bellevue Arts Museum's Arts Fair](https://www.bellevuearts.org/artsfair) (<https://www.bellevuearts.org/artsfair>), July 28–30. There will be a dedicated stage for kids' music and shows kids can enjoy while

they dance, blow bubbles and make crafts. Don't forget to check the events page at your local parks department – weekend art workshops usually aren't added to the calendar until summer vacation starts.

Teen arts scene

Outdoor art supplies

Your art-minded teen might be happy to spend all summer holed up in their room drawing. Nagging isn't likely to drive them outside, but art supplies might. Give them a [flower press](https://www.amazon.com/Large-Flower-Press-Kit-For-Adults/dp/B08Y6ZNDVF/ref=sr_1_1_sspa?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20) (https://www.amazon.com/Large-Flower-Press-Kit-For-Adults/dp/B08Y6ZNDVF/ref=sr_1_1_sspa?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20). Make a pilgrimage to the art supply store and let them pick out a [plein air easel](https://www.dickblick.com/categories/furniture/easels/plein-air/) (<https://www.dickblick.com/categories/furniture/easels/plein-air/>), or dig up a [Super 8 camera](https://www.ebay.com/b/Super-8-Movie-Cameras/4689/bn_155491) (https://www.ebay.com/b/Super-8-Movie-Cameras/4689/bn_155491) on eBay. Yes, they can probably make a better film using an app on their phone. But a vintage camera begs for filming “on location,” while a cellphone begs for Instagram doomscrolling. (Handing a camera to a younger child automatically unleashes their inner Ansel Adams, turning any event or outing, no matter how boring, into an occasion for art.)

Itinerant art aficionados (free!)

Prep your teen for their broke-student phase with some life lessons in finding free stuff. You might be surprised how much art you can discover exploring your neighborhood. But you can also plan a walking tour around (or practice driving to reach) [public art](https://www.seattle.gov/arts/experience/maps-and-apps) (<https://www.seattle.gov/arts/experience/maps-and-apps>) or the area's best [graffiti art](https://findmasa.com/city/seattle) (<https://findmasa.com/city/seattle>). You could spend all summer [mapping](https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1YQc-IE_Ml6VRIOJqU2P-I9bpW1M&hl=en&ll=39.37868239821717%2C-116.02760949999998&z=4) (https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1YQc-IE_Ml6VRIOJqU2P-I9bpW1M&hl=en&ll=39.37868239821717%2C-116.02760949999998&z=4) the works of prolific muralist Henry, or just focus on his [earlier pieces](https://www.parentmap.com/article/exploring-seattle-public-art-with-kids-henry-murals) (<https://www.parentmap.com/article/exploring-seattle-public-art-with-kids-henry-murals>) for a day of Henry hunting.



Catch a classic family movie at an outdoor venue. Photo credit: SeattleCenter.com

Outdoor screens and stages

During our northern summers, sunset is too late for many younger kids to enjoy [outdoor movies](https://www.parentmap.com/article/outdoor-summer-movies-around-seattle-bellevue-eastside) (https://www.parentmap.com/article/outdoor-summer-movies-around-seattle-bellevue-eastside). But the late start is perfect for a (free) night on the town for teens who might want to celebrate a new driver's license by taking the family out for a night at the drive-in. Budget for fun concessions and food-truck treats, or bring snacks from home to keep costs at zero.

Reading his plays in class probably won't convince your teen that Shakespeare is lively and funny (and bawdy), but watching the plays performed live in a park might. [GreenStage](https://greenstage.org/) (https://greenstage.org/) performs [Shakespeare in the Park](https://greenstage.org/2023-season-announcement/) (https://greenstage.org/2023-season-announcement/) throughout the area each summer, launching the season with a weekend festival at Volunteer Park in early July. [Burien Actors Theatre](https://battheatre.org/) (https://battheatre.org/) is performing "Good Morning, Bill" (https://battheatre.org/shows/current-season/good-morning-bill) at parks in South King County in July and August. These performances are free, but if you're willing to buy tickets, check out [Kitsap Forest Theater's productions](https://www.foresttheater.com/shows/2023-season) (https://www.foresttheater.com/shows/2023-season) of "The Sound of Music" and "Seussical, The Musical," or [Snoqualmie Falls Forest Theater's](https://www.foresttheater.org/theater/) (https://www.foresttheater.org/theater/) summer season, TBA.

Fun-for-all bonus: Fourth of July fireworks

Whether you appreciate fireworks as art or not, they definitely serve as inspiration for child-like imagination. Bellevue's fireworks are accompanied by Bellevue Youth Symphony. If you can brave the Seafair crowds at Gas Works Park or Lake Union Park, there are all kinds of all-American performances and games to inspire creative writing sessions the next day. KEXP-FM 90.3 usually simulcasts a musical playlist to match the fireworks. The radio broadcast is handy if you live in the neighborhood or can find a less crowded spot in the vicinity with a view. You could also challenge your child to prepare their own playlist for the family to enjoy together while watching the pyrotechnics from your preferred viewpoint.

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