

# Exploring HortPark's Nature Playgarden: Where Children Grow Wild

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Playgrounds provide an environment that helps children develop important cognitive, social and physical skills.

## Introduction

Children's playgrounds are found throughout Singapore and typically consist of popular play equipment such as swings, slides, climbing frames and monkey bars. Child developmental research suggests playgrounds provide an environment that helps children develop important cognitive, social and physical skills<sup>1,2</sup>. Benefits of playground play include honing skills in balance, depth perception, core body strength, hand eye coordination and improved cardiovascular health<sup>3</sup>. Cognitively, children benefit from practicing perseverance, building resilience, problem-solving and risk assessment<sup>4</sup>. Children also hone their skills in communication, negotiation, patience, empathy and care for others within a shared space<sup>5,6</sup>. Whilst playgrounds can be either indoor or outdoor, we know both offer (sometimes differing) benefits in terms of tactile and sensory stimuli<sup>7</sup>. Research also suggests that outdoor play improves children's vision and allows children to get enough Vitamin D<sup>8</sup>. Recent studies have further found that the exposure to natural elements, such as biodiverse soil, may play a crucial role in building immunity in children<sup>9,10</sup>.

## A playground without slides and swings

The Nature Playgarden @ HortPark was launched in March 2019 as a part of the National Parks Board's City in Nature vision. Its aim, in part was to encourage children to spend more time outdoors by increasing the diversity of children's play environments and foster stronger connections with nature. The Playgarden juxtaposes typical conceptualisations of children's playgrounds with its distinct lack of man-made infrastructure and notably abounds with nature-based resources, lush trees and open-ended play opportunities. To maximize green spaces for children's wellbeing, landscape architects from the National Parks Board created play spaces where children can connect both with nature and each other. The garden's nine play spaces were curated for various play opportunities including free, imaginative play.