



**Level:** Toddler

**Cost:** Less than \$15.00

**Mess Factor:** Some

**Suggested Room in the House:** Outside



So, you just read an article in a parenting magazine that explains the benefits of letting your children explore art materials, such as markers, glue, and paint! You want to give your children experiences that will benefit their development, but you feel a bit nervous about bringing paint into your house, not to mention putting a paintbrush into the hands of toddlers! Here's an activity idea and some tips for a stress-free painting experience that you and your toddlers will enjoy!

### Your children will experience:

- Exploring art materials
- Using art materials to make discrete marks
- Discovering what they've made and talking about what it looks like



### Materials:

- Child-sized easel (optional – see “Hints” below)
- Chubby paint brushes
- Washable (non-toxic) paints
- Paper
- Paper or plastic cups (Dixie cups, empty yogurt containers)
- Damp wash cloths or towels for cleanup
- A bucket of warm water
- A painter's drop cloth, an old sheet, a plastic shower curtain liner, or a large piece of plastic to place under the easel (optional)
- A warm, sunny day
- A safe area outside



### Before You Get Started:

Set up a child-sized easel outdoors on a flat surface, such as a patio, driveway, or grassy area (you may want to look for a gently used easel at a garage sale or secondhand store before paying full price for one). If you use washable paint, there shouldn't be a need for a cloth or piece of plastic underneath the easel for messes, but go ahead and add one, if you feel more comfortable doing so. A covering like this could cushion a possible fall and prevent skinned knees or elbows if your little one takes a tumble. Pour a small amount of paint into two disposable cups (place one of the cups on the easel tray, and put the other one to the side to introduce later in the activity). Attach a piece of paper to the easel. Fill up a bucket with water and gather some old towels for cleanup. This might seem like a lot to get ready ahead of time, but you'll be glad you're prepared when your hands and your toddler are covered in paint!



*continued on next page*

**Beginning:**

Dress yourself and your toddlers in “play clothes” (undressing down to just a diaper or putting on a large t-shirt will work well for toddlers, too) and head outside for some fun and creativity! Show children how to dip the paint brush into the paint cup, and demonstrate how to brush the paint onto the paper. It won’t take long for children to join you in the fun!

**Middle:**

Toddlers may be more interested in exploring the paint than in using the paintbrush to paint on the paper. Let your little ones stick their fingers or hands in the paint and rub it around on their hands, arms, or on the paper. Talk to children, saying things like “The paint feels cool on your arms” or “The paint feels slippery between your fingers.” You may want to put children’s paint-covered hands on the paper so they can see their handprints.



Older toddlers may be interested in giving the paintbrush a try. It will take some practice for little hands to learn how to hold a new “tool.” As they become more comfortable with controlling the paintbrush, toddlers will begin to make discrete marks on the paper. Children will learn that, by hitting the brush onto the surface, it makes a big “splat” mark with a lot of little marks around it. Toddlers will observe that, when a paintbrush that is full of paint is held against the paper for several moments, the paint drips down the paper. Your children will notice that making different movements with their arm will produce different lines and marks on the surface. Watch toddlers, and describe their movements while talking about the marks they create. For example, you might say, “When you tap the paintbrush on the easel, you make red polka dots on your paper” or “When you stretch your arm high and bring it down, you make a long line on your paper.”



As children learn more words and have more opportunities to explore art materials and tools, they might make a mark, look at it, and tell you what they think it looks like. For example, after making a long line across his or her paper, your toddler might say, “Make a road!” Or, after making a large circle with the yellow paint, your toddler might say, “Big sun!”

**End:**

As children finish the activity, you may want to add one more twist to extend their play — for example, introducing a new color of paint and another paint brush to the easel. Toddlers who have just mastered the use of one paintbrush might now begin painting with a new color or figure out how to paint with both brushes at once! If you’ve introduced two primary colors (red, yellow, or blue), you may want to talk to toddlers about how the colors are changing to make new colors. For example, you might say, “You started painting with red, and you just mixed in yellow. Now it looks orange!”



*continued on next page*



### Cleanup:

Leave children's artwork on the easel to dry or (if multiple paintings were made) lay the papers on the ground, secured with a couple of large rocks to keep them from blowing away. Toddlers can help you throw away the paint cups and place the paint brushes in the clean water to soak. Depending on how children explored the paint, cleanup may be as simple as using some damp cloths to wipe off hands, or it might involve carrying children inside the house and directly into the bathtub! Either way, you can feel good knowing that your little ones have just had a valuable experience exploring, creating, and learning with a new material (and you'll feel even better that your house is still clean)!



### Younger Children:

- Infants' first experiences with art come from the different colors and textures parents and caregivers offer them through visual stimulation, toys, and other objects. Mobiles with bold patterns or bright colors give very young infants something interesting to watch. Toys with interesting textures to manipulate and feel on their skin or explore with their mouths are important for young sensory learners as well. Other objects offer infants a variety of textures to experience: a soft blanket on their bare legs, fresh blades of grass on their hands or feet, or the rough feel of tree bark on their fingertips.



### Older Children:

- Older children, who have had some experience exploring art materials and tools, will begin making simple representations of such things as a tree or a house. These beginning pictures will have just a few details. As children continue to develop, they create more complex representations (such as a picture of the pet dog, complete with four legs, a body, a tail, a head with eyes, nose, mouth, and tongue). In order to modify the painting activity for older children, you may want to offer more paint colors and provide additional brushes. You can also talk to children about their paintings, making comments like "Tell me about what you are doing" or "Oh, you're making a tree. This straight line must be the trunk, and the green circles on top must be the leaves. I'm curious to know why you made those red dots."



### Hints:

- For children who are beginning walkers or who aren't used to standing for long periods of time, you may not want to introduce the easel at this time. You can simply place paper on the ground and secure it with heavy rocks or tape. Consider introducing an easel as children become steadier on their feet and coordinated enough to control a paintbrush while standing.
- Begin with a very small amount of paint in the cups, and add more as needed. This will help keep large amounts of paint from spilling onto the ground or into the paint tray. It will also make cleanup easier since you can simply throw away the paint cups, rather than having to pour paints back into the paint bottles.



*continued on next page*



- Try stirring a small amount of tear-free baby wash or shampoo into the paint. This will make washable paint even more washable, so that it will come off of skin and clothing with less scrubbing.



### More!

- For even less mess, bring the painting fun into the bathtub. Purchase or make your own bathtub paints, and let your toddler paint with a brush or finger on the walls of the tub. Since there won't be any artwork to save, be sure to have your camera on hand to snap some pictures of children's creativity in action! Cleanup is simple — either wipe the paint away with a wet cloth or use a spray bottle filled with water to rinse off the walls of your tub. Many recipes for homemade bathtub paints can be found on the Internet. Here's a favorite one to try!



### Homemade Bath Paint

- ¼ cup tear-free baby wash or shampoo
- ¼ cup corn starch
- 1–2 TBS water
- 3–4 drops food coloring

Combine cornstarch, shampoo, and food coloring. Add water, a little bit at a time, until the mixture reaches the desired consistency. If it gets too runny, add more cornstarch; if it gets too thick, add more water. Store paint in small plastic containers (with lids).



- Still not ready for paint? Fill some buckets with water, gather some big paint brushes, and head outside on a warm, sunny day. Find a flat surface (sidewalk, driveway, deck, porch, garage door, or privacy fence), and begin “painting” the surface with the water. In addition to exploring the art materials (in this case, water) toddlers will experience the process of painting and will enjoy noticing the contrast between the wet and dry surfaces. Older toddlers may notice the marks they've made disappearing, adding a scientific twist to the activity! Cleanup is as simple as dumping out the buckets of water and watching the water race down the driveway, or pouring the leftover water onto the flowers, giving them a much needed drink!



### Special Needs Accommodations:

- Children who are sensitive to textures or smells might be hesitant to use paint. If this is the case, you may want to try painting with water, as suggested in the “More!” section, above. Parents may also want to try introducing the homemade bathtub paints (see recipe in the “More!” section, above). By offering something homemade, with a more familiar smell (such as the baby wash or shampoo), toddlers may be more willing to touch and explore it. Toddlers who have motor delays might find paint brushes difficult to hold and manipulate. Finger painting may be a good option, offering toddlers the experience of exploring the paint with success and confidence, without the challenge of controlling a paintbrush.