

Summer Break Needs More Bugs and Mud | Swaner EcoCenter

07/10/2026

Summer's halfway through, and all the kids seem to want to do when they're home is turn into little slugs and go catatonic in front of a TV, phone, or game console. I mean, summer is all about chillin', right? Well, yes... but!

There's no better time than summer break for kids to enjoy the most entertaining act around, and nature play is where it's at.

Hear me out: most of our sweet little pre-humans won't leap off the couch when you say, "Sammy, wouldn't you rather go look at bugs outside?" But with some intention and behavior modeling on your end, you can open their eyes to a world of wonders far better than anything on a screen.

Why bother, other than to let your kids experience the summertime pleasures of days of yore? Because it's good for them. Like, really good for them. Research continues to show that nature play benefits kids at every age (even old kids like us). It builds curiosity, problem-solving skills, and the ability to learn. It fine-tunes the senses and helps children more fully observe the world around them. Time in nature supports emotional health, reduces anxiety, encourages healthy risk-taking, and helps kids develop empathy for other living things. Sadly, screen time does none of these things.

But how do you coax the little buggers into nature play? (And it does take some coaxing.) Here are a few tips:

1. **Preview.** The night before, let your kid know you'll be doing an outdoor activity tomorrow. Tell them what and when—just enough so they can picture themselves doing it. Remind them again about an hour beforehand. You'll meet less resistance.
2. **Do it with them.** Let your kids see your curiosity overpower your squeamishness or your playfulness overpower your germophobia. Side-by-side nature play works wonders. Go ahead—get dirty.
3. **Reward them with your attention.** Outdoor play together is one of the strongest ways to establish a

love of nature and strengthen family bonds. Your full attention is the secret sauce.

4. **Try proven kid-friendly activities.** Catch bugs and observe them up close. Build mud dams and castles. Create fairy houses from natural objects. Plant seeds. Visit farm animals. Pack a picnic. Race sticks down a stream. Read nature stories and poems at bedtime.

Need help getting started? Swaner Preserve & EcoCenter in Kimball Junction is here to help with oodles of family programming like guided nature walks, nature crafts, and ready-made family nature activities so all you have to do is show up. We're open Wednesday - Sunday, 10am – 4pm, and we host a special (and free!) [family nature programs](#) monthly.

Give it a go. Get the kids outside. Help them get dirty, explore, and have fun. They just might discover that delighting in nature's little joys beats numbing away the summer above an iPhone screen. Maybe those moments become the very best part of summer.



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Location, Hours & Contact

Physical & Mailing Address
[1258 Center Drive](#)
[Park City, Utah 84098](#)

EcoCenter Hours

Wednesday – Sunday, 10 am – 4 pm

The EcoCenter will be closed on Wednesday, October 7 and Thursday, October 8.

Email

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Phone

435-649-1767

[Directions, Parking, & Transit](#) [View Staff Directory](#)

- [Swaner EcoCenter Facebook page](#)
- [Swaner EcoCenter Instagram page](#)

Events

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"SpudConfig2" , teaserBase : "https://extension.usu.edu/swaner/calendar" }); </script> [View Full Swaner Preserve & EcoCenter Calendar](#)