

Choosing The Right Outdoor Play Equipment

A Guide to Choosing Safe Outdoor Play Equipment for Children



BROUGHT TO YOU BY:
[FAMILY LIVING IDEAS](#)

Feel free to share this report with others!

Choosing Safe Outdoor Play Equipment for Children

Introduction

Children love to be outside in the sunshine and fresh air. And they need unstructured play to develop some skills they'll need later in life. If they can find a great park to play in they can be occupied for hours climbing, jumping, and playing on the equipment. As a parent you may want to give your children the same type of fun at home, so you may be looking for hints on choosing safe outdoor play equipment for children in your own family.

The following report will give you ideas as getting your child's input for the play area, general buying points to consider, types of ground coverings for different areas, what materials of outdoor play equipment you may want for your children, how to buy the equipment you've chosen, the best layout or design for the play area, as well as safety tips you'll want to enforce. Hopefully, after reading this report, you will have a better idea of what you want when choosing safe outdoor play equipment for children you love.

Get Your Child's Input

Since you're making the play area for your children or grandchildren, you may want to ask them what they want. They will be the ones using the equipment day in and day out, so it's important to choose pieces your children will actually use. Without asking them for their input, you may spend a large amount of money on equipment they'll never use both now and in the future when they grow up.

If you're lucky to find it, some playground equipment is designed to grow with your children. Although it will probably cost you quite a bit more, depending upon how old your children are, how long you plan to remain at the same location, and what your family's budget looks like this type of outdoor play equipment may be the most cost effective.

Consider what your child enjoys. Do they often play like they're knights in medieval times? They may like to have play equipment in the shape of a castle. Are they interested in gymnastics? You may want to provide a 'balance beam' close to the ground for them to practice balancing on.

The idea is to get your children's input into what they want in play equipment. Giving them a say in what the play area looks like will give them a sense of ownership. Does that mean you have to incorporate everything the children want into the final design? Absolutely not, however adding some of the items your child wants will let them feel like they had a say and who knows, they may have some really great ideas you'd never considered before.

For instance, did you know children love having plants and water in an outdoor play area? This will give them the opportunity to enjoy nature. They like to have a variety of surfaces levels. Not only

do they like to climb chain walls, steps and ladders, they also like to crawl under things in their play. They also like structures which can be changed to suit their imaginative play.

Remember, children will benefit from unstructured play where they can use their imaginations. However, they'll also benefit from having something to spur that imagination as well as giving them plenty of room to play in an active way. Since they're outdoors, let them learn about the world around them. Give them the opportunity, as well as a safe place to play and their imaginations will soar!

General Buying Points to Consider

Manufacturers providing quality outdoor play equipment will be forthcoming about everything pertaining to their product. They will gladly indicate the fact they use non-toxic or low-lead paint to ensure the health of those using it. They will design their equipment so there are no bolts sticking out where children can be injured or their clothing torn. They will be able to be secured to the ground so they can't tip over while in use. They will also provide advice on what type of surface is best used with their equipment. Finally, if there are exposed ends, they will cover them so the raw edges will not injure children.

Check with the Better Business Bureau (BBB) to see if there are any red flags you should be aware of. People who are satisfied with a company often don't call the BBB to brag on a company, however if there were problems you can be sure the BBB would have heard about it. They will be able to tell you if there have been complaints and what the nature of the complaints was. Having this information can help you make the best informed decision when it comes to choosing safe outdoor play equipment for children you love.

If you have someone come to your home to set up an outdoor play area, don't leave your child's safety to chance. Ask to see a copy of the company's licenses; they'll most likely have to have at least one if not more. You may also want to ask for references and be sure to call them to ensure the company is reputable and others have been happy with their work. Of course, if you're doing the work yourself this won't be an issue to be concerned with.

Types of Ground Coverings

Many people don't consider what type of surface is best for outdoor play equipment. In some cases families will simply set up a store-bought unit and place it directly on the grass in their yard. In most cases that's not the best choice; in fact, the surface under an outdoor play area is as important as the location and the equipment from a safety standpoint. What type of surface there is under a piece of outdoor play equipment can determine the severity of an injury should a child fall from the equipment.

Surfaces not appropriate for playgrounds, whether at home or in a park, include asphalt, blacktop and concrete. They have absolutely no give to them should a child fall. It would also be better not

to use grass, packed soil, or loose soil because the weather can adversely affect how they perform in cushioning a child's fall.

Appropriate surface choices include wood chips, mulch, sand pea gravel or shredded rubber which is at least 10-12 inches deep, particularly under equipment which is up to 8 feet high. If you have equipment higher than 12 feet high, you won't be able to find a surface material which would be considered safe enough.

When laying out the playground area, be sure to extend the cushioned surface at least 6 feet beyond the piece of equipment. For instance, if the swing set has a slide, you'd want to have cushioning 6 feet past the end of the slide where the child would exit. Additional cushioning may be needed for very tall slides or swings which are long.

Having a level playground is also important. Be sure there are no puddles which could cause slipping. Clear out any weeds or tree stumps or roots which could cause a fall. It should also be clear of construction materials such as nails, screws or bolts as well as broken glass or twisted metal pieces.

Remember, no matter what type of surface is used under outdoor play equipment, the best way to avoid injury is to keep the height of the equipment under 8 feet. You'll also want to maintain adult supervision when children are playing on the equipment. Teaching children the proper use and safety instructions for using the equipment will also help them avoid injury while playing on the outdoor play equipment.

Materials of Outdoor Play Equipment

When it comes to outdoor play equipment there are a number of materials to choose from. What type of material you choose for the children in your home may well be determined by their age and your budget.

Plastic play sets are appropriate for most toddlers because it is low to the ground, can be assembled at home, and has different features which toddlers would enjoy. Toddlers love bright colors and plastic equipment definitely fills that bill! The major drawbacks for this type of play equipment are that use will be limited to children who are 4 to 5 years at most and the equipment is easily moved. Some toddlers have been known to tip this type of outdoor play equipment over, or it's been overturned during strong storms.

Cedar and redwood outdoor play equipment is a better choice if you want something that's going to be long lasting. These natural woods don't require as much maintenance as some other materials but they can be quite expensive. This type of material may be one of the options to consider if your children are pre-school age or a little older as the play equipment will endure years of use. It can also add value to your home should you choose to move.

Another wood option would be to use pine however you'll want to be sure to get 100% chemical free lumber if choosing this type of material. The pressure treated pine might be more durable but the chemicals used are hazardous to children. This type of material, whether using pine, fir or spruce, will also require annual maintenance to enable it to withstand the elements.

Your final material option is metal. Galvanized steel is a good choice for a simple swing set, but your child may want something other than a swing. Look for other sets in galvanized steel if you can find them. Other types of metal will rust which will lead to failures and possibly injuries.

Be aware of the hardware used on each type of outdoor play equipment you consider. The hardware should be flush to the surface of the equipment or even slightly recessed to keep children from being injured on the nuts and bolts holding the equipment together.

How to Buy the Equipment

After you've had a chance to discuss everyone in your family's ideas about what should be included in the outdoor play equipment, take time to do some research. Check with large discount stores to see what they have available and how much it costs. You'll also want to check the telephone book to see if there are any businesses which specialize in outdoor play equipment. They will be able to give you a quote for purchase and installation of play equipment.

Another option is to see if you can find companies which manufacture, deliver and set up play equipment that are listed online. In many cases the internet will be a better source than a telephone book, particularly if you live in small town and you'll have to find someone who lives a bit off from you. You may also want to stop and ask other people who have play equipment in their yard who they purchased their equipment from. In most cases they'll be glad to share that information.

Consider starting with a basic playground set and adding to it as your child grows up. This will save you a good deal of money to begin with and allow you to budget for any additions you choose to make in the future. You will also be able to adjust the play equipment to your child's tastes as their interests will change over time.

Remember to learn what you can about each manufacturer of outdoor play equipment. Your child's safety depends on their equipment so you'll want to be sure you've chosen the right one. You know the equipment and installation isn't going to be inexpensive, but you can save money without sacrificing quality if you will take time to research your options and then make the most informed choice possible.

Layout or Design Ideas

Consider your yard when choosing safe outdoor play equipment for children. Is your yard level or does it slope downhill in areas? If your yard slopes in areas and is not level, you may want to avoid some types of play equipment. Sloping may cause puddles and the ground needs to be able to drain properly.

The size of your yard may also be a determining factor in what equipment you purchase. Some outdoor play equipment can be quite large and won't fit in all yards. Mark off the area you're planning for the play area, draw it to scale on a sheet of paper, and make scale drawings of the equipment you'd like to purchase. Doing this before you purchase the equipment will keep you from spending money for items you can't use due to lack of space.

The layout or design of the play equipment can directly affect how safe your child is. Pay attention to the path your child will take to the equipment. Is it clear of obstructions so your child won't fall and get hurt? Did you consider putting a barrier around the equipment area to keep the cushioning surface in place? If so, will there be a clear opening for the children to enter the play area?

Place the play area away from the garden or other areas where you'd like there to be quiet. You'll also want to spread the equipment around the play area to keep children from standing in front of the other pieces of equipment while they're in use. Place moving equipment, such as swings or merry-go-rounds, at one end away from non-moving equipment.

If you have children of different ages, you'll also want to have equipment separated according to the size of the children. In other words, you won't keep swings for toddlers in the same area as the exit of the slide for older children. In fact, you may want to have separate areas completely for different age groups to keep younger children off equipment designed for older children and to keep older children from tripping over smaller children.

General Safety Tips

After you've determined the different zones for your play equipment and made sure there is the correct amount of cushioning surface under and around the equipment (a 4 foot fall zone around each piece of equipment is a minimum and 6 feet around the slide), you'll want to think about the general safety tips for choosing safe outdoor play equipment for children. Each piece of equipment has its own inherent potential problems. Here are some things to consider about each one:

Swing sets – This may be the one piece of outdoor play equipment where most accidents happen. The best type of material for the swing seat is a soft material such as plastic or rubber. Metal and wood are too hard. Imagine if your child fell off the swing and it came back and hit them before they were able to get up, or if a child was walking in front of one that was pushed. A metal or wooden swing could cause serious injury whereas a plastic or rubber swing seat wouldn't be quite as bad.

Swings should have rubberized chains rather than ropes. These won't pinch fingers or hands the same way as an uncovered chain will. It also won't fray or rip the way rope does.

Hold the chains on the swing set with an "S" hook which should be closed or can be closed to keep the chain in place. The chains should also be straight rather than able to cross which will keep children from twisting the ropes and going around in circles.

There should be no more than two swings per section of the set. The seat of the swing set should be a minimum of 24 inches across and the swing should hang no closer to the ground than 12 inches for small children and 16 inches for grade school children. The swings should be placed at least 30 inches apart from each other, and the swing leg braces, to ensure the children will not bump into each other.

Teach children not to go too near a swing while it's in use. They should also remain seated while swinging rather than standing or kneeling on it. Children should also stay on the swing until it has come to a complete stop. Finally, be sure the children understand that a swing is only meant to hold one person not more than one.

Slides – Children love to play on slides and they are safe if the slide is in good repair and the children use them properly. There should be at least six feet of cushioning around the end of the slide where the children exit so the children will not be injured if they can't get their feet under them.

It is also important to ensure the handrails and ladder are tight rather than wobbly. If the slide begins to shake when a child comes down, the child may be too heavy for the slide. There should be a side railing along the slide at least 2 1/2 inches high to keep children from falling off the side of the slide. Another option would be to find a scoop-style slide which is circular and makes falling out nearly impossible.

Children should be taught to take one step up the ladder at a time. Teach them to slide down and climb the ladder up, not that they should try to walk up the slide. They should also only go down the slide sitting on their bottom not lying on their head or stomach.

One child should be on the platform waiting to go down the slide; children should not go down the slide together as a group. They should also check to be sure no one is standing too near the bottom of the slide before going down.

Jungle gyms or climbing frames – This type of equipment is great for teaching children to use their eye/hand coordination. The frame itself should be sturdy enough for several children to play on it at the same time. It is important that the frame be set in the ground to keep it from toppling over while the children play.

Having hand grips at regular intervals will enable the children to climb safely. Poles to slide down should be anchored at both the top and the bottom to ensure the pole will remain intact while the child slides down it. Any ropes should also be anchored at both the top and the bottom. This will reduce rope movement while the child is climbing and make climbing safer.

Elevated platform equipment – Some children aren't able to climb on jungle gyms or climbing frames. For them an elevated platform with stairs may be more to their liking. These elevated platforms can be more than 20 inches off the grounds, so it's important that they have guardrails going up the stairs and around the platform to keep children from falling off. For preschool children, if the platform is more than 30 inches from the ground, it should have protective barriers to keep children from falling off.

Protective barriers, normally vertical bars, should be close enough together to keep children from being able to put their heads through the bars. These will keep children safe from falling and yet avoid other possible injuries.

Seesaws – One of the pieces of outdoor play equipment that children love. It is best to keep preschoolers off of these unless they are fitted with springs which will keep the seesaw from hitting the ground abruptly. This could cause the child to be injured when they fall off while near the ground, and could cause the child who is in the air to fall, too.

Seesaws should have only one person per seat. If the children don't weigh close to the same amount, don't let other children get on the seesaw to make up the difference. They should find someone else to play with on the seesaw for safety's sake.

You'll also want to teach children to face to proper way – facing each other, not with their backs to each other – to be safe. They should also hold on tightly with both hands. Teach them to keep their hands on the handle rather than trying to touch the ground with them and to keep their feet out to the sides to avoid injury. Because of the possibility for children not to use them properly and the possibility of injuries, many parents choose not to include seesaws as part of their outdoor play equipment.

Unsafe outdoor play equipment

Some equipment which is considered to be unsafe, and probably not desirable for home play equipment, includes the following:

* Animal figure swings because they are bulky and generally hard. A child could be seriously injured if they were accidentally hit with one of these swings. The swing may also not be centered well and a child could lean forward too far and fall out.

* Glider swings are another item which isn't recommended, particularly for younger child. Children like to ride more than one child per side on a glider. If you choose to include a glider swing with your outdoor play equipment, be sure to teach them to ride it with only one child per side of the glider.

* Exercise rings may not be a good choice for home play equipment. These, along with trapeze bars, may be better left to a gym for gymnastics.

* Trampolines are great items to have for older children who are responsible enough to follow directions. Be careful about allowing more than one person on the trampoline at a time. It is possible for children to bounce right into each other which can cause injuries. They might also bounce into each other and knock someone off the trampoline all together.

After you've finished choosing safe outdoor play equipment for children in your life and have the pieces set up, be sure to maintain the equipment to keep them safe. Check the pieces periodically to ensure it's not broken. If the equipment is wood, check to see if it is splintering or cracking. Reseal it if necessary. The same goes for metal equipment; check it to see if it needs to be sanded to remove rust and repaint it if it needs it.

Ensure the surface material is properly maintained. It should be loosely packed to provide the cushioning needed. Make sure the fall zones around the equipment are covered as they should be. You'll also want to verify the nuts and bolts are holding the equipment together and they're not working themselves loose. Tighten any bolts which may be loose.

Have your children help you keep the play area clean. Pick up any limbs that may fall from trees. Throw all garbage in a trash can close to the play area but out of the way of the play equipment. If everyone in the family, and those who use the outdoor play equipment, will work together to keep the pieces in good working order, they can be enjoyed for years to come.