

Paints for All Ages

by Gina Moore



So there you fret, having to separate your preschooler from your toddler each time your preschooler wants to finger paint because your toddler can not resist tasting the paint! Or worse, you swear off all painting activities for the next three years. For inexpensive and non-toxic solutions, enjoy trying the "paints" below.

If you believe food and play should not intermix, try one of these suggestions: Separate mealtime from art time by the use of a special art smock or a separate art table to reinforce when it's okay to "play with your food".

or

Be patient and consistent, eventually you can both "play with your cake and eat it, too". Enjoy your child's playful way of learning -- yes, he/she is learning while making such an incredible mess! In the warm weather, set up an outdoor paint station.

or

Simply and sadly ban art activities from your kids or expect to stay frustrated from fussing, which kills the excitement of the activity! ☺

Safety note: Use common sense and please remember to always monitor your children. These activities are not meant as babysitters. (Children can drown in just a few inches of water!)

Also, if your child's healthcare provider does not advocate dairy products for your child before a year, your child is dairy-intolerant, or you're vegan, you can substitute mashed potatoes for the yogurt/pudding paint.

Lastly, dispose of any unused paint after use. Without preservatives these will spoil.

Now, on to the fun stuff...

Yogurt (or Pudding) Paint (ages 9 months and up)

Plop a dollop of yogurt (using plain yogurt, with its tart flavor, will not be as palatable to your child, encouraging him/her to paint with it, rather than eat it) or pudding on a clean table in front of your youngsters. (Painting on trays, like the ones in buffet restaurants, make clean up a breeze. You just rinse the tray in the sink instead of having to scrub the table.) Younger kids will simply use their fingers to eat it (developing the small muscles that will eventually help them write), but older ones can be encouraged to write their names, draw shapes, etc. (a fun way to encourage writing).

Variations:

>Give the children two scoops of two different colors to blend. >Sprinkle any color dry child's drink mix (or even flavored gelatin mix on white or light colored yogurt or pudding for the child to mix in.

>Used with a paintbrush, this paint is not runny like a liquid paint. Attach paper to an easel or stick it to the fridge (a wipe able surface!) and let your little one paint like a pro.

>For a special treat, finger paint with whipped cream for a fluffy texture.

However, the kids may not paint with such a yummy medium!

>If paint becomes too runny, add a small amount of flour or baby cereal to thicken.

>For textured finger paint, mix in some finely crushed graham crackers.

>For cold-weather fun, use freshly made cooked pudding with its soothing warmth.

Water Colors (12 months and up)

With the arrival of spring many families spruce up their homes with a little spring cleaning. Get the kids involved by letting them paint the house! Okay, let me clarify.

With some inexpensive brushes, a clear or white bucket, some water, and very little food coloring, you'll keep your Tom Sawyers busy all day. Just fill a bucket with water and drop in *only enough food coloring to tint the water* (and therefore, not stain their clothes and the house). Hand each one a brush and let them slop around. I like to use a clear or white bucket for a more vibrant water color. Be ready to refill the bucket several times before the kids finish. (I used to let my Kindergarteners paint the school building during the daily 30 minute recess without anyone getting bored!)

Variations:

>Spark science skills by mixing colors.

>Provide a variety of "brushes", like sponges, sponge brushes, and small rags

>Pour colored water into small spray bottle for spray art. Ensure that your child will not spray this on other children, animals, your new leather purse, etc.!

Marker Watercolor Painting (18+ months)

Have lots of dried-up markers in your art drawer? Try this... Show your child how to dip the tip in a shallow bowl of water (1/4 to 1/2 inch deep) and paint with the tip. Marker can be reused until the tip turns white. You can also use a paint cup with a special no-spill lid, like at left.

Marble Painting (3+ years)

Place a sheet of paper in any shallow box, toss in a couple of marbles (any size) and drip some paint (2-3 colors work best) in randomly on the paper. Let your child tilt the box and watch the marbles paint the paper as they roll through the paint drops. This painting creates a great matte for your child's picture.

~ Use red/white for Valentine's Day. Glue a picture of your child to the center of the painting (once the painting is dry) and give to a loved one.

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