Montessori at Home

A Nature-Led Guide for Families

Cedarwood Montessori
Seale Hayne Estate, Devon

01

A Welcome from Cedarwood

There is something quietly powerful about a child given the freedom to follow their curiosity — to crouch beside a hedgerow, turn over a stone, press a leaf between their palms, and simply *notice*. At Cedarwood, we believe that this kind of deep, unhurried attention is not only natural to children, it is at the very heart of how they learn.

This guide was written for you — the parents and carers who are the first and most enduring teachers in your child's life. It is not a list of rules or a rigid framework. It is an invitation: to look at your home with fresh eyes, to slow down alongside your child, and to discover how small, thoughtful choices can create an environment where wonder, independence, and love of the natural world can grow.

“The most important thing is not the shelf or the basket — it is the quality of attention you bring to the space you already have.”

You do not need a large home, expensive materials, or a dedicated room. The Montessori approach meets you exactly where you are.

About This Guide

Each section explores a different aspect of creating a nature-led home environment. Read it from beginning to end, or dip into the sections that feel most relevant right now. There is no perfect order — just as there is no perfect childhood.

02

The Prepared Environment

Maria Montessori spoke often of the *prepared environment* — a space intentionally arranged to support a child's natural drive to learn, explore, and become independent. At home, this doesn't mean overhauling your living room. It means asking a simple question: *Does this space invite my child to participate, or does it ask them to wait?*

Order and Simplicity

Children thrive when their environment has a quiet order to it. Too many toys, too much visual noise, or items stored out of reach can make a child feel overwhelmed and dependent. Consider rotating toys and materials — keeping out fewer things at a time often leads to deeper, more focused engagement.

> **Try this: The Basket Rotation**
>
> Choose 5–8 items to have available at any one time. Store the rest. After a week or two, swap some out. You will likely find your child greets the returning items with fresh enthusiasm — and engages more carefully with what is in front of them.

Child-Sized and Accessible

When a child can reach, carry, and return their own materials, they are practising independence with every interaction. Low shelves, pegs at child height, a small stool at the kitchen counter, a hook by the door for their own coat — these small changes send a powerful message: *you belong here, and you are capable.*

Beauty and Nature in the Space

Montessori environments are deliberately beautiful — not in a fussy, untouchable way, but in a way that reflects care and respect for the child. Natural materials, living plants, seasonal collections from outside: a conker, a feather, a sprig of dried lavender. These things connect the indoors to the living world outside the window.

- Place a small tray or basket near the door for things gathered on walks — leaves, stones, seed pods.
- A low windowsill display might hold a seasonal nature collection the child has arranged themselves.
- Introduce real, breakable objects where safe: a ceramic cup, a glass bud vase. These teach care.
- Favour wood, wool, cotton, and clay over plastic wherever possible.

03

Nature as Teacher

The natural world is the oldest classroom there is. Long before Montessori gave us the language for it, children were learning mathematics from spiralling shells, science from puddles and seeds, art from skies and bark. Our role is simply to protect the time and space for that learning to happen — and to be curious alongside our children.

“A child who spends time in nature is not missing out on learning. They are learning everything.”

Slow Down Outside

The habit of the purposeful walk — arriving somewhere, completing something — can crowd out the kind of wandering attention that is most nourishing for young children. When you can, let the walk be the destination. Follow your child's gaze. Stop when they stop. Resist the urge to name and explain everything — sometimes just being present together is enough.

Seasonal Rhythms at Home

Children are deeply attuned to the rhythms of the natural year. Simple seasonal practices at home — a winter solstice candle, spring bulbs on the windowsill, a summer nature table, an autumn foraging basket — give children a felt sense of time, continuity, and belonging in the world.

Ideas for a Seasonal Nature Table

Choose a small shelf, windowsill, or tray that changes with the seasons. Invite your child to collect and arrange items: spring — catkins, bird feathers, early flowers; summer — shells, pressed flowers, long grass; autumn — conkers, acorns, red leaves; winter — pine cones, seed heads, a small candle. Let the child lead the arrangement.

The Garden and Outdoor Space

Even a small outdoor space — a balcony, a window box, a shared garden — can become a rich learning environment. Digging, watering, watching a seed become a plant: these are not supplements to learning, they *are* learning. Allow mud. Allow mess. Allow the occasional failed experiment with a slug and a lettuce seedling.

- Give your child their own small plot, pot, or trug to tend — however small.
- Keep a magnifying glass outside and use it together.
- Notice the birds. Keep a simple bird list on the kitchen wall.
- Make space for outdoor loose parts: sticks, stones, cones, shells, scraps of wood.
- Let rain be an invitation, not an obstacle.

04

Practical Life at Home

In Montessori settings, *practical life* activities — pouring, folding, sweeping, preparing food — are among the most valued work a young child can do. Far from being chores, they are how children build concentration, coordination, independence, and a deep sense of contribution to the family.

The home is the original practical life classroom. Everything children see adults doing — cooking, cleaning, gardening, caring for others — they want to do too. When we allow them in (really in, not just watching), we offer them something profound: the feeling of being genuinely useful.

In the Kitchen

- Wash vegetables. Tear salad leaves. Stir batter. Peel a banana.
- Pour their own water from a small jug kept at child height.
- Spread butter, top their own crackers, arrange fruit on a plate.
- Help set and clear the table — this is real, meaningful work.
- Compost scraps: a daily ritual that connects food, soil, and cycle.

Around the Home

- Sweep with a real child-sized brush and dustpan.
- Fold and sort laundry — matching socks is an early maths activity.
- Water plants with a small watering can.
- Polish shoes, wipe surfaces, wash their own bowl after breakfast.
- Help with care of a pet, if you have one.

The Golden Rule of Practical Life

Go slowly, and demonstrate without words where possible. Show the action — the careful pour, the slow wipe — and then step back. Resist the urge to jump in. The struggle is where the learning lives. If something spills, welcome it: 'Let's clean that up together.'

05

Language, Stories, and the Living World

Language is woven through everything in a Montessori home. Not in the form of flashcards or drilling, but in the richness of conversation, the stories we tell, the songs we sing, and the precise, beautiful names we give to things in the natural world.

Naming the World

One of the most powerful things you can offer a young child is specific vocabulary for the world around them. Not just 'bird' — but 'wren', 'jackdaw', 'swift'. Not just 'tree' — but 'hawthorn', 'elder', 'rowan'. These names are not just labels; they are relationships. A child who knows the name of a thing feels a bond with it.

Books and Storytelling

Fill your home with beautiful books — and leave time for stories that go beyond the page. Tell stories from your own childhood, from the seasons, from the land where you live. Oral storytelling is one of the oldest forms of human connection, and children are naturally hungry for it. It builds imagination, memory, and a sense of place.

Story Walks

On your next walk, invent a story together as you go. Let your child name the characters and choose what happens next. Use things you see along the way — a mossy log becomes a giant's house; a puddle becomes a magic mirror. No planning needed.

Writing and Mark-Making

Before children write letters, they need many experiences of making marks: in sand, in mud, in paint, with chalk on the pavement. In Montessori, we do not rush towards formal writing. We trust that a child who has had rich experience of moving their hands — through art, clay, threading, pouring — will come to writing with confidence and readiness.

06

Rhythm, Ritual, and Rest

Children do not need endless stimulation. They need rhythm. The predictability of a daily rhythm — not a rigid timetable, but a familiar flow — gives children a felt sense of safety that allows them to be more adventurous, more curious, more themselves.

“A rhythm is not a schedule. It is a pattern your child can feel — a held breath before the candle is lit, a song that means supper is almost ready.”

The Value of Unstructured Time

In a culture of busy-ness, unstructured time has become almost countercultural. And yet it is in those long, unhurried stretches — when a child is 'bored' and given space — that some of the deepest learning happens. Resist the urge to fill every gap. Boredom is often the doorway to creativity.

Simple Daily Rituals

- A candle or lamp lit at the same time each evening to mark the change of pace.
- A morning walk before the day begins — even ten minutes.
- A weekly nature collection ritual: gathering and arranging something from outside.
- A rest time after lunch, even if not for sleeping.
- A bedtime story with the same beloved rhythm each night.

Screens and Stillness

The Montessori approach encourages protecting time away from screens, particularly for under-sixes — simply because the hands-on, sensory richness of real life offers something screens cannot replicate. Mud, texture, weather, the weight of a conker in a small palm: these are irreplaceable. Where screens are used, keeping them short, intentional, and followed by time outdoors is a gentle and kind guide.

07

Supporting Independence

At its heart, Montessori is about trusting children. Trusting that they want to learn, want to help, want to be capable. Our job as parents is not to do things *for* them, but to create the conditions in which they can do things *themselves* — and to hold steady while they try.

The Art of Stepping Back

This is the hardest part. When a child is struggling to button their coat, every instinct says: *let me do it*. The Montessori invitation is to wait — to observe — to trust that the child can manage, and that the effort is more valuable than the speed. One of Montessori's most quoted phrases: *'Help me to do it myself.'*

A Child-Prepared Space

Work through your home and ask: what can I lower, simplify, or make more accessible? A hook at child height. Their shoes by the door. A drawer in the kitchen just for them. A low shelf in the bathroom with their own flannel and toothbrush. Each small change is an act of respect for your child's growing competence.

The 'Yes' Environment

Rather than filling the home with 'no' and 'don't touch', consider what you can make safe and available. A child who lives in a 'yes' environment — where their curiosity is welcomed rather than constantly redirected — builds trust, confidence, and genuine self-regulation over time.

08

A Word About You

Everything in this guide is offered in a spirit of gentleness — including towards yourself. Parenting is not a project to be optimised. Some days the nature walk doesn't happen. The prepared environment looks like a tornado passed through it. Dinner comes from a tin and the screen is on longer than planned.

None of that undoes the love, attention, and presence you bring. The Montessori approach is not a standard to meet — it is a direction to lean towards. A gentle encouragement to slow down, trust your child, and trust yourself.

“You are your child's first and most important teacher. The love you bring to your home is the foundation everything else rests on.”

We hope this guide sits lightly in your home — something to return to when you need inspiration, not something to weigh you down. If you have questions, observations, or simply want to talk through how things are going, our team at Cedarwood is always here.

Come and See Us

We warmly welcome families to visit Cedarwood Montessori at the Seale Hayne Estate in Devon. Come and spend time in our setting, meet our team, and experience the environment for yourself. Visit cedarwoodmontessori.co.uk or get in touch to arrange a visit.

Cedarwood Montessori — Seale Hayne Estate, Devon — cedarwoodmontessori.co.uk