

# Step 3 - Storage & Maintenance

There are as many ways to store and make use of loose parts as there are settings! We encourage everyone to find ways that make sense in your context. To give you some ideas, here are some models that others have found effective in their own schools and organizations:

## Playground in a box:

One teacher fills a box with small loose parts such as pieces of tissue paper, rubber bands, paper clips, dried beans, marbles and clothespins. Every day she brings the box out for the students in her class to play with. Over time, the students bring their own materials to add to it.



## Classroom cupboard:

In another school, an old stationary cupboard is stocked with straws, cups, tape, and folded up cardboard boxes.

The teacher brings the materials out for indoor 'choice time' within the school day or recess when it is raining. The children use bedsheets to turn their school desks into tents, and blow balls of tape across the floor with straws. Many of these materials come from the teacher's and parents' homes.



## Outdoor playground:

In a large school with mixed ages, adults bought a shipping container and filled it with tires, milk crates, sturdy buckets and spoons, as well as a couple pieces of heavy rope and cable reels. These materials are chosen to last, and make best use of the large and flat playground. Children often stack the milk crates or tires for climbing. At the end of recess, children quickly gather the materials back into the shipping container, which is then locked.



## Shared porch space:

A group of nursery teachers who share a porch wanted a selection of loose parts that would survive getting wet during monsoon season. They gathered cups and spoons, pots from the kitchen and sponges. Children practice pouring rain water into cups, float sponges as 'boats'. Materials are stored in open milk crates, to let them drain when not in use.



When you're first reading about loose parts, or dreaming big about the possibilities of play in the lives of children you work with, it's easy to get excited - and we want you to get excited! At the same time, it's best to start small and grow slowly, as you and the children learn more about play with loose parts together. Begin with materials that you feel comfortable and confident with, then observe what children do with what you've provided. Reflect on what you saw, and if possible discuss this with colleagues or friends.

Let that guide you.

## Maintaining the materials

However you store materials, set up a regular schedule for maintenance. Go through them piece by piece to see what is popular and what is ignored. Does anything need replacing? What forms of play are children particularly interested in, and what could you supply to support that? If children are building houses with cardboard, what could you provide to let them expand or decorate these further?



Sometimes children will ask for specific materials, and by all means supply those if you can. If not, don't worry too much. Bringing a range of materials helps create all sorts of ideas!

Take a look too, at anything that has lost its value for play. Are there materials that have been all used up, or which the children clearly don't use? Are there items that are broken? Feel free to remove anything that doesn't seem to be working and replace it with something else. Supporting play, like play itself, is a constantly unfolding process.

## Cleaning up

Are children responsible for cleaning up the materials after they have played with them? This is a question which every setting needs to answer for themselves. Here are some opinions for you to consider.

### **Yes, children need to gather up what they have taken out.**

In one school, there are very few teachers and they don't have time to clean up after recess. The space is shared with another project and nothing can be left out. If children here do not take responsibility for the loose parts playground then the program cannot continue.

### **No, children's focus at a playground should be on play**

At another school, recess is short and many children use the same playground in waves. If children took the materials out and put them away, there would be very little time to actually play with them! One or two teaching assistants stay out after recess to put the materials away.

When you're deciding, ask yourself: What is in the best interests of children's play? You can also reconsider this later on, and change accordingly.