

# Sensory Bins

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Sensory tables are a staple of play-based toddler programs and preschools. A sensory bin is a large tub full of some loose material, tools for scooping, pouring, and manipulating the material, and often other toys mixed in. It is a pure play-based activity, where children can settle in and explore to their heart's content.

## How to Assemble a Sensory Activity

It's as simple as choosing a container, and then mixing and matching from the chart on the back of this page:

- **Fillers:** If you're a parent trying to keep one child entertained, a big bag of rice or dry beans, or a bin full of water, is all you really need. If you're a preschool teacher, there's lots of creative options.
- **Tools:** A few cups to scoop with and bowls to pour into is a good place to start. Tweezers and tongs to pick items up with, funnels and sifters and tubes and water wheels to pour through, and narrow necked bottles to pour into add to the fun.
- **Add-Ins:** Many of the toys your child plays with can be mixed into sensory play – farm animals, or superhero action figures, or plastic dinosaurs can be added in and you can use blocks or other building materials to make their homes there. You can hide things in the sensory material for a scavenger hunt where children search for all the items on a list, or they can find shells, fossils or other materials and then match them up to a key to learn what type of item they are. Try building a sensory bin to tie into a class theme or a favorite story book.

## Sample Bins

- A garden: potting soil or chocolate cloud dough, combined with hand rakes or trowels, big lima beans as "seeds" to plant, plastic flowers, and small signs to label the rows.
- An off-road race course: kinetic sand, ramps, and monster truck toys.
- Pirate's treasure: rice, a small treasure box, plastic coins, and mardi gras beads.
- Magnet exploration: rice, a variety of small objects – some metallic, some not – and magnets.
- Bug hunt: potting soil, plastic bugs, shovel, tweezers, magnifying glass, and bug books.

## Benefits of Sensory Play

In our academically driven world, parents may see sensory play as "just play" and wonder 'what's my kid actually learning'? Here are just a few things kid learn through sensory play:

Fine motor skills, strength, and flexibility. Eye-hand coordination.

Life skills: Kids learn to use tools of all sorts. Pouring, scooping, stirring and so on are skills they will use in the future in the kitchen, in chemistry class, in household maintenance and elsewhere.

Mess management: Kids learn to be OK with having messy hands. (Modern kids are doing a lot less outdoor play, like making mud pies, and less outdoor work, like mowing lawns, and many young adults struggle with messy chores and their ick factor.) They learn (eventually) how to play with messy things without making a mess, and how to help clean up any messes they make.

Spatial understanding – the meaning of empty, full, volume, weight – will the materials from this container fit inside that container?

Social skills, language – As they play together around the table, children socialize, negotiate sharing tools, and create stories together.

Learn more at: <https://inventorsof tomorrow.com/2018/06/22/sensory-bins/>

# Sensory Table Ideas to Mix and Match

Pick one item from each column.

Fillers	Tools	Add-Ins
Rice	Scoops	Blocks
Pasta	Measuring Cups	Toy Animals
Cornmeal	Rakes	Fake Flowers
Oatmeal	Trowels	Plastic coins
Whole Grains	Tongs	Mardi gras beads
Lentils/Split Peas	Tweezers	Rocks / Sticks
Dry Beans	Funnels	Magnet Items
Flax Seeds	TP Tubes	Plastic Bugs
Water Beads	Containers	Ice
Sand	Ice Cube Tray	Magnetic Letters
Rock Salt	Sifters	Wooden Numbers
Plastic "grass"	Magnifying Glass	Puzzle Pieces
Potting Soil	Balance Scale	Party Décor
Shaving Cream	Sand Castle Molds	Toy Bulldozers
Cloud Dough	Ramps	Cars & Trucks
Oobleck	Water Wheel	Dolls

**Safety Note:** These materials are all appropriate for most children ages 3 and up. Some are not appropriate for children under age 3 or with sensory / developmental challenges, particularly if those children tend to put everything in their mouths. Use caution and your best judgment based on knowing an individual child.