

Making Space For Playgrounds



A guide to getting started
for preschool teachers
and parents...

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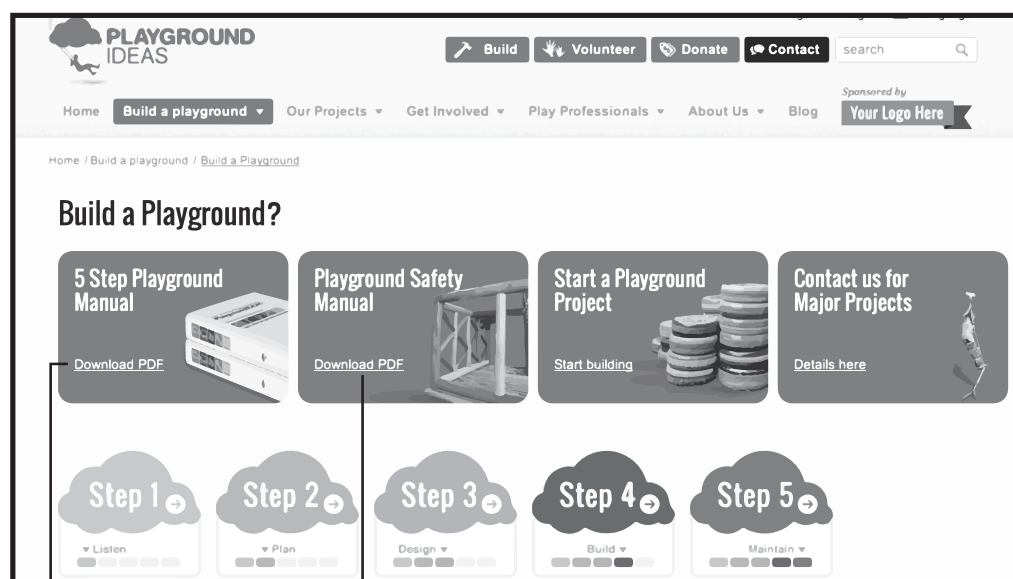
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Introduction

Attending preschool is an important first step for children on their path of education. Important skills in literacy, numeracy, reading, writing and comprehension all begin with this step. It is also very important to recognise that play and activity is an essential part of children's physical and cognitive development. Whilst children in Timor Leste have ample time and spaces to play outside school hours, it is the crucial learning experiences of constructive play, challenges and problem solving through play which could be better supported and resourced through outdoor education playgrounds in Timor Leste, particularly in early childhood education.

Playground Ideas, an NGO based in Melbourne have developed excellent resources based on years of experience in constructing playgrounds as a community project out of locally available materials. Their resources are available on the internet at this address: **www.playgroundideas.org**- where you can download their guides on design process and safety to get started on your playground project. There are many examples to be inspired by, and you can easily follow their five step approach: Listen, Plan, Design, Build, Maintain. These are the best guides to use when you are ready to start your journey towards building a playground for your preschool. Some of the ideas below are found in the Playground Ideas Guidebooks. Reading these will help to understand the importance of play, and the wide range of possibilities for your playground.



Picture of PGI website and manuals

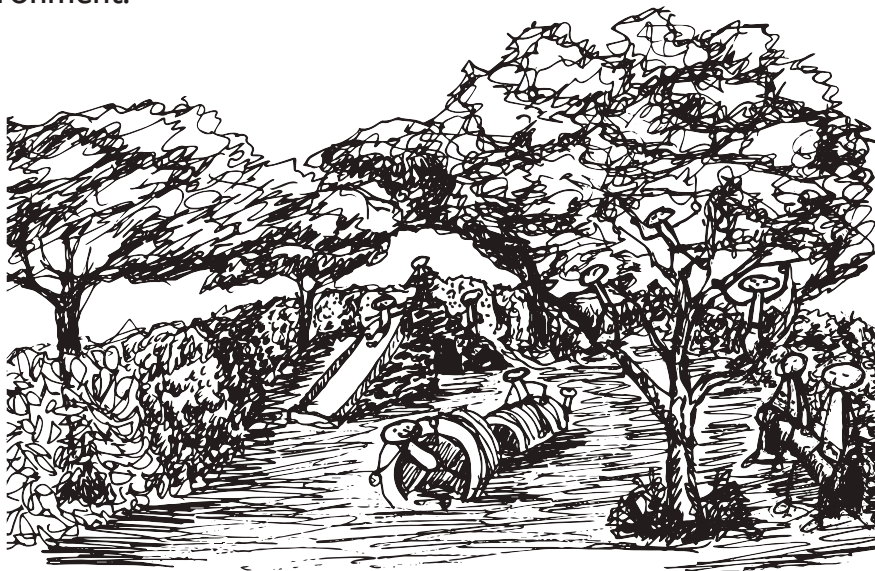
Download the 5 step manual here

Download the safety manual here

Preparing for a playground- About this guide.

This booklet is a short guide on how to prepare your preschool outdoor area for the development of a playground. It is helpful and important to do this before you start to build a playground. It focusses on the use of plants to do this as they are widely available, easy to maintain and replace if necessary, and most of all people in Timor are very good gardeners. Wonderful places for children to play can be made with planting to define the playground area, so when play equipment is put in, it is a part of a whole play environment.

A preschool playground is where young children make some of their first friends and start exploring the wider world around them. Its important to make it a nice place for them.



Challenges for playgrounds in Timor Leste

People anywhere in the world will face some challenges when building a playground. There may be issues with cost, safety, location, area, building resources etc. Timor -Leste has its own specific challenges for developing playgrounds.

Recent research in 2014 into Early Childhood education in Timor Leste stated:

“It is rare to see teachers utilise the outside of the classroom for learning activities as they are either unaware of how to do this or do not have appropriate equipment. The safety of the children could also be a factor as many Pre- Schools are not fenced to keep children safely inside the grounds and animals out. Most schools do not have playgrounds that help to develop children’s physical and social skills.”

From our own research in Lospalos 2015, we have found the following challenges affecting the use of preschool outdoor areas such as...

1. No effective boundary to ensure safety from cars, motorbikes and animals.
2. Too hot to play or supervise outside in the sun because of a lack of shade.
3. Dangerous items outside or nearby such as abandoned buildings, open drains, rubbish dumps and large animals near the play area.
4. No public understanding of where the boundaries of the preschool outside area are.
5. Public use of the playground area during and after school time.
6. Land ownership claims of preschool land from pre- Indonesian occupation.
7. Limited or short time of attendance at preschool each day.
8. Available equipment being damaged or difficult to maintain.

Solutions to these Challenges

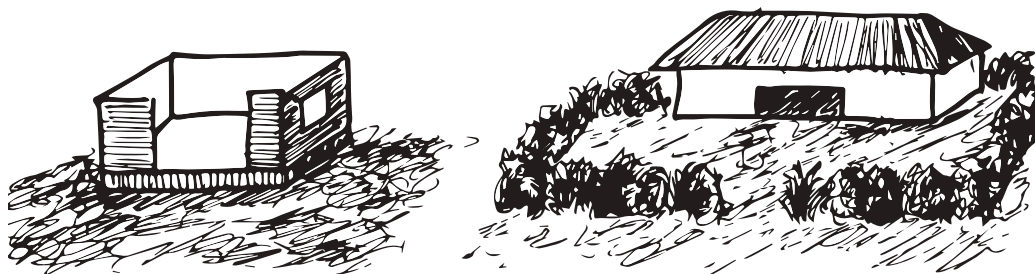
Most of these challenges to using outdoor areas are able to be addressed by creating a 'sense of territory' or definition to the play area. Building a playground is like building a home for your children to play and learn. When building a home, first we need to understand the land and build the foundation, build the walls for some privacy, and build a roof to protect from sun and rain. We can then place furniture and items so we can enjoy the home.

Playgrounds are a similar process, with three important first steps... understanding the preschool land use as a foundation, creating boundaries help to define the play area, and planting trees to make shade. We then have a nice place to put equipment for children to play on. This preparation is very important if the existing outside area is difficult to use for play.

Diagram of house building being similar to playground making



1. Understand Land use: Understand the ownership and terms of use of the preschool building and land.



2. Create Boundaries: Establish clear boundaries to the playground site- usually the edge of the property or the area of the property that can most easily be supervised.



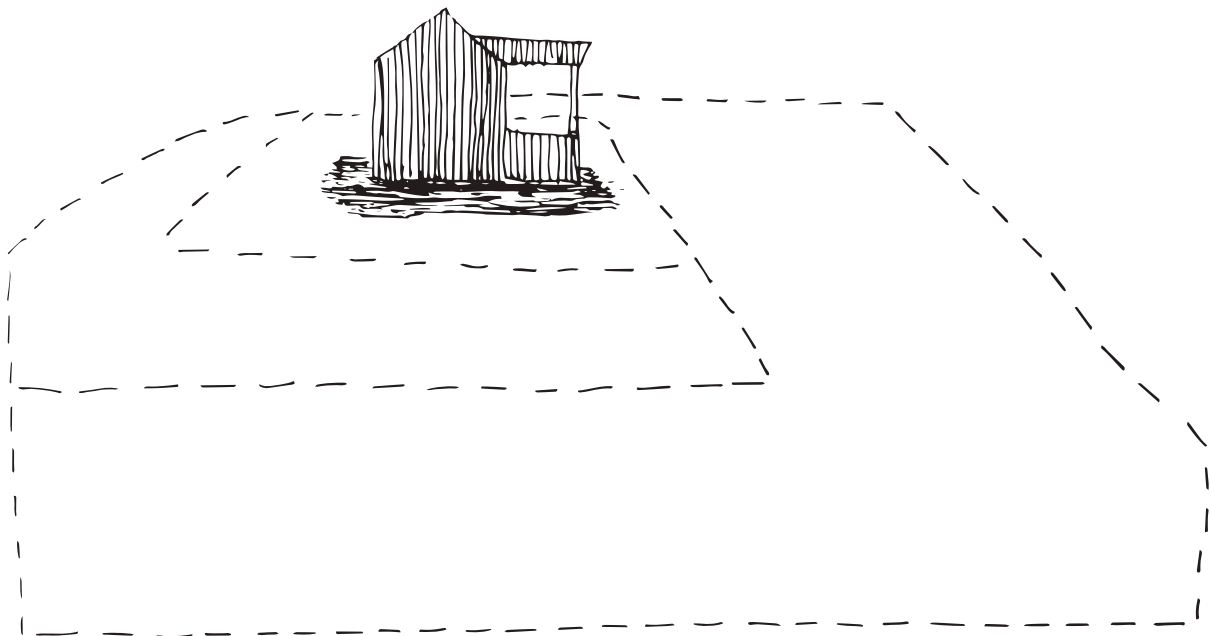
3. Create Shade: Take steps to create adequate shade so the area can be used comfortably by the children, teachers and parents.

Land Use

It is important to understand the long term use of the building and land where the preschool is located. Understanding this is like the foundation to your house. Due to the young age of Timor-Leste as a nation, determining who owns land from pre-Indonesian times and who has rights over the land is an ongoing process. Having a discussion with the building owner, the subdistrict administrator, the Chefe de Suku and the education department about any knowledge of land claims of the preschool site will help to establish if this may be an issue for the preschool. It will also be helpful in determining the boundaries of the site. If the property is leased then you can find out for how long, and what the land owners future plans for the site may be.

Keep in mind that if the preschool is affected by land use claims, or a short term lease, then outside play is still very important! It may however affect the way you decide to use the outdoor area for a playground. For example, you may want to make inexpensive boundaries such as fast growing plants, shade and equipment, or use 'loose parts' equipment such as boxes, bamboo, or local toys that are moveable and can be taken with you. . Making areas for games such as hide and seek or small rolling tyres is also possible in temporary playgrounds.

It is important to understand the boundaries of the play area so you know where to plan your playground.



Boundaries

Creating an effective boundary is one way to develop a good 'sense of territory' to the playground site. These are like the walls of a house that protect what's inside. Many challenges to using outdoor areas such as keeping children in, and other elements out can be addressed through creating effective boundaries. The type of boundary will depend on the location of the playground. Consider what will be on both sides of the boundary: on the inside will be children playing in a variety of ways, on the outside could be animals, cars and motorbikes, people, noise, other children, youth, and the rest of the community. You may want to create a strong boundary between the inside and outside, or a partial boundary that allows children to have some visual or social interaction with the outside world. Boundary does not always have to mean a solid fence of bricks and steel. It could be a living fence of plants, or a simple half buried tyre edging to define the area where children can play. It all depends on the context of the playground and what you want the fence to do, with the most important function to keep children safe.

A traditional living fence of plants can form a very effective boundary if the right plants are chosen, and the plants are close together. A living fence makes use of the great gardening tradition and culture in Timor Leste, and is a way for parents and teachers to easily contribute to creating the space for their children's playground. Below is a list to help you choose the best plants for a boundary to your local playground.

A simple boundary lets children know where they can play, and keeps the area more private.

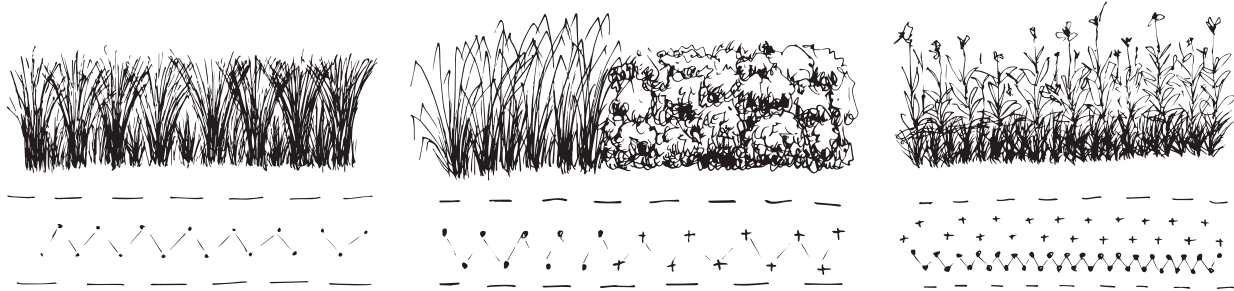


Choose plants that...

1. Last a long time, or have a long life.
2. Have most of their leaves all year round
3. Are strong and able to handle having children around them.
4. Have low leaves, to the ground
5. Grow 1, 2, or 3 metres tall depending on the site.
6. Are a buffer to noise (such as bamboo)
7. Are not poisonous to eat, irritating to the skin, or have irritating saps
8. No thorns or sharp leaves
9. Choose plants with interesting colourful flowers, fragrant flowers or leaves, and tasty fruits.

It can be very helpful to draw a basic plan diagram of the playground area and where you want to plant your boundaries. This will help you to see how many plants you need, and what steps you can take to protect the plants while they are young. Boundaries can also have irregular shapes on the inside which will help to make separate areas for different types of play.

Planting diagrams of boundaries and planting patterns



The shape of boundaries can create areas for different activities in the playground.



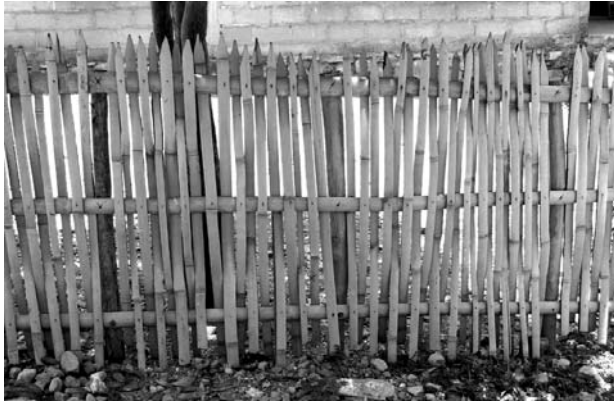
It is important to use the right plants for the location. Shade will make some plants grow thin without many leaves or branches which will mean they will not form a good boundary, so choose plants that work well in similar light conditions. Look in your local area at living fences and see what works well.

Image examples of living fences, Image examples of ideal plants for boundaries.



In busy areas with many people or vehicles or areas with animals it is good to make a temporary fence to protect the plants. This can be like a house fence that can be removed once the plants have grown. Temporary fences can be made from bush posts and split bamboo.

Temp protective fence examples- images of temp fences



Constructed fences are also a good option if funds are available to build them and people prefer this option. The type of fence will depend on budget for construction, ongoing maintenance and available materials. Constructed fences can also include plants growing on them to make them more attractive, and perform better as a boundary. This guide can also apply to existing fences or constructed boundaries.

Shade

Creating some shade in the play area will help children use the playground for longer, and in more imaginative ways. Shade is possible through the use of trees, which are like the roof over the playground. Children may be happy to play in the sunshine, however we have observed they will only play in the sunshine for a short time before looking for shade to cool down. In addition, children tend to play in certain ways in the sunshine, preferring active play, sports and games. It's rare to see children slow down for other types of play in the sunshine. Some play equipment can become too hot and difficult to use in the sunshine, so planning for some shade will help the playground equipment be well used in the future. Timor has many trees which are good to use for creating shade.

Below is a list to help you decide what trees to use for shade in your playground.

Choose trees that...

1. Have leaves all year round
2. Are not dropping branches or falling in the windy season,
3. Are 6-8 metres in diameter when fully grown
4. Have a good canopy spread to create shade.
5. No poisonous or irritating leaves, fruits or saps,
6. Have interesting flowers/ fragrance/ tastes
7. No heavy fruits or heavy shedding leaves (ex: coconut)
8. No thorns or sharp leaves or branches.

Image of a shade tree: The Kali Tree

This tree is a favourite of many communities in Timor Leste for the shade it provides from the heat of the sun.

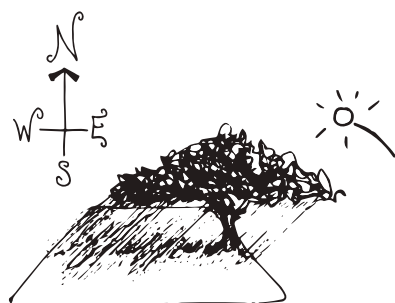


Its also good to consider some trees that may be good for climbing. Look for trees that are well climbed in your community and plant the same type of tree.They should have strong branches and these branches start fairly low to the ground. And remember not to plant a climbing tree to close too the boundary! Climbing will need to be supervised so its good to place a climbing tree where it can be easily seen. Planting trees on the eastern side of the playground will give morning shade, on the northern side will give shade for lunchtime, and the western side will give shade for the afternoon.

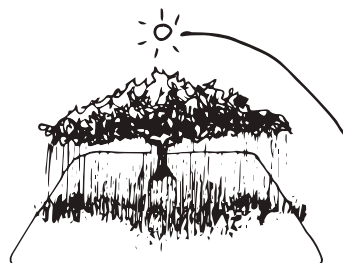
Some examples of good climbing trees in playgrounds.



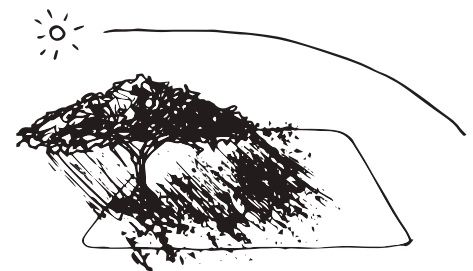
Diagrams of shade orientation



Morning shade



Midday shade



Afternoon Shade

Trees may need to be protected from damage until they are established. This can be done in a similar way to the measures taken to protect the boundary. Larger trees may only need a post or two for protection.

Image of a tree planted with temporary protection.

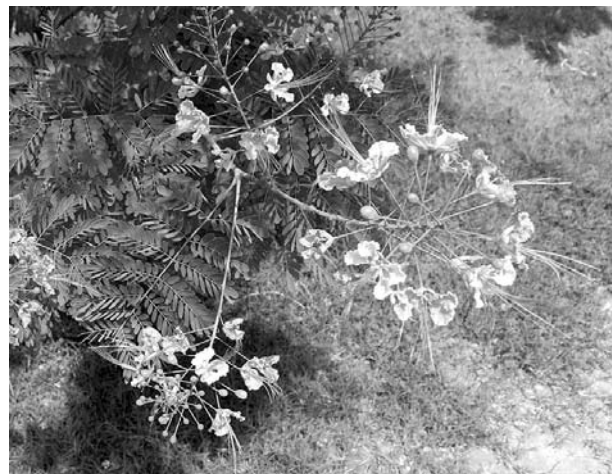


Planning for planting.

Discuss the plans and the lists with parents and invite their input. Ask them to prepare as many plants as they can from their homes for planting. Plan one day of each month that is a planting day for the preschool, and keep this going. Remember to use plants with multiple functions, for example a shade tree with leaves that could be great for children to trace or make into art, or trees that attract birds. Including boundary plants with colourful flowers, edible fruits, pleasant smells or attract butterflies or birds are also very attractive and interesting to children.

It can be good to plant around other edges or corners of the space such as buildings, or other existing trees, this will make the outdoor area more interesting and attractive for children to spend time in. Remember to leave plenty of open space for access and the building of playground equipment.

Edge planting, habitat planting, interesting leaves/ fruits



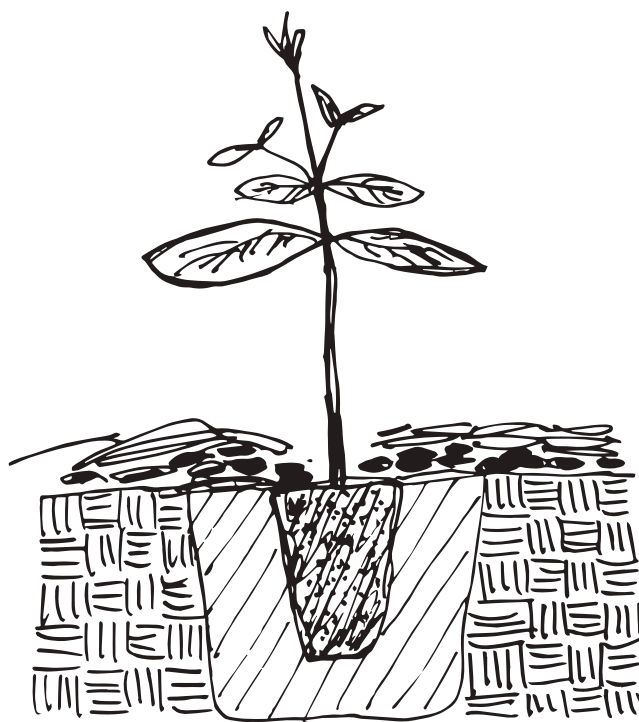
The best time for planting is the rainy season, from Jan through till May/ June, with the best months being February and March. Keep plants watered in on days with no rain.

Planting Technique

When we start planting it is important to follow a method that helps the plants get their best start.

A simple process for planting...

1. Assess whether the plants will need protection from animals/ people walking/children playing/ motorbikes etc, if they do need protection, build a temporary fence to protect the planting area. If this is not possible due to costs, then other methods are possible.
2. Collect enough plants to complete one small area at a time. Water these plants well before planting. If you are using cuttings from plants, ensure they are fresh.
3. Dig a good size hole twice as big as the pot.
4. Take the plant out of the pot carefully, place in the hole, and cover with soil ensuring the plant base is level with the existing ground, not too high or low. Double check there are no roots exposed, if there are, cover these with soil. If you are using cuttings, make sure the whole cutting is buried about one finger length deep.
5. When finished planting, use plenty of water to water the plants in.
6. It is very helpful to protect the new plants. This is a good way to save water, protect from the sun, and limit grass growth around them at same time. The traditional approach is to use cow and horse manure around the plants and cover over the manure and between the plants with many cut banana leaves. The more banana leaves you use, the better for the plants
7. If there is no fence, make a border to the planted area with sticks or logs, and protect the plants with posts around the plants.



Ensuring safety

It is important to assess your area for safety as a part of the playground preparation. Repair, or remove objects in the play area that may be dangerous to children.

Objects such as broken pipes, sharp or rusty steel, exposed nails or bolts ends, open uncovered drains, animal tethers etc. can all be dangerous to children. Review the safety manual on playgroundideas.org for help in assessing your area. You can also enlist the help of parents in a safety assessment. Write down all the issues you find that need attention, and take action on them as soon as possible.

Preparing the outside area of your preschool is an important first step towards building a playground. Understanding land use, creating boundaries and planting for shade all help to define the play area that will become an important part of their learning experience and development. It is important that play equipment is understood as a part of a whole play environment. Taking the steps outlined in this guide is a practical way for the preschool community, parents and teachers to create this environment and a great place for their children to play.

