



This activity can be used as part of the review of a wetland unit or incorporated within the unit. It's a lot of fun and allows kids to be creative while building connections between the parts and function of a wetland and the very sensory aspect of eating the items representing these wetland features.

Here's the idea: Discuss the word "wetlands" with your child and the types of wildlife (plants and animals) that depend on them. Think of different life forms that exist around wetlands. This will look very different for different ages and can be as simple as reading a book about a wetland, or one that takes place within a wetland setting and pointing out the different animals and plants to an early elementary aged child, or it can be as technical as looking up how wetland function to filter water or as amazing breeding habitats if your child is older elementary or middle school.

Now build your own "wetland" out of edible materials. There are many different variations of ingredients and many methods of running the activity. Use what you have at home and if you don't have something have your child draw it, cut it out and tape it to a toothpick or piece of a straw to stick into the wetland.

Pick from the list below:

Ground/base of wetland

- 9"x13"pan of brownies or chocolate cookie bars, chocolate cake
- or
- individually wrapped brownies or snack cakes

"Water" and "land"

- vanilla icing
- blue and green food coloring
- or
- Blue fruit roll-up – body of water
- Green fruit roll-up – aquatic plants/grass

Wetland elements, wildlife

- Fish shaped crackers/ fish gummies – fish
- Green lollypops – trees and shrubs
- Gumdrops – shrubs
- Gummy bears -animals
- Animal crackers – animals
- Coconut dyed with green food coloring – grass
- Chocolate chips- rocks
- Graham cracker crumbs – sand
- Instant chocolate pudding or pudding cups – mud

Other Items Needed: Plates, napkins, knives to spread icing if using

Basic Procedure:

Assembling the wetland is fun and can be done many ways. Adjust the steps so that they work for you.

Start by giving your child a plate and an individual cake/piece of brownie

Talk briefly about what wetlands are: a distinct ecosystem that is flooded by water either seasonally or permanently and have vegetation and animals adapted to living in uniquely wet soil.

That means they are muddy, marshy, swampy, some are even dry at some points of the year. The types of animals and plants that live there are unique to a wetland ecosystem, they need an area wetter than a forest or field but can't survive in the open water of a lake or large river. Think about the area where a lake meets a forest, the wetland would be that strip of space where those two ecosystems meet and create a uniquely different third ecosystem.

Mix the blue food dye into a few spoons of frosting and the green food dye into another few spoons of frosting explaining that they represent the water and the grass. Cover about half of the brownie with each color. (If using fruit roll ups add them and any mud or sand to the cakes now.)

Go over the components of a wetland briefly connecting what each food item represents as you add that item to your wetland. (Sometimes the lollipops are too heavy to stand, you can stick them into a gum drop for more support) Make it fun. Maybe tell a story and as you mention items add them. Play with your food.

Take pictures as they finish and let the kids enjoy.

Extensions: You can go into a much longer discussion of wetlands, their function and structure before the activity as well as how each of the components you have interact within the wetland.

Print out small pictures of wetland animals and glue to popsicle sticks or toothpicks. Before the activity have students discuss how that animal is adapted to living in a wetland, what might its niche be? They can then add the animal to their finished wetland. They can even research animals before this activity and create a wetland habitat specific for that animal.

