

Reading Matters

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Getting Muddy: Celebrating Children's Books about Dirt by Jean Dugan

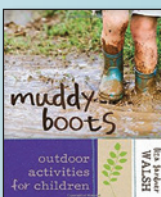
International Mud Day! A day that's all about getting muddy is a holiday that's fun to celebrate and to share. In past years, we've pulled weeds, thrown pots, harvested lettuce from the garden, splashed in puddles, or built sand castles on June 29. This year we'll be visiting the tides and mudflats in the Bay of Fundy. Now science tells us that the bacterial microbes in soil have antidepressant qualities, so what could make us all healthier and happier than getting muddy? Here are some good books about playing in dirt.

Jean Dugan, a long-time friend of *Exchange*, has been connecting kids with books for over 40 years. She helped establish a library program in the elementary schools of Gloucester, Massachusetts, and later brought her love of children's literature to the public library there. This is one more opportunity for her to share the best new books with children and those who care about them.



Muddy Boots: Outdoor Activities for Children

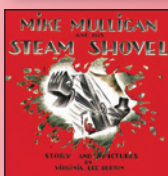
is the ultimate guide to Mud Day festivities and being in touch with the earth beneath our dirty feet. As author Liza Gardner Walsh says in her Note to Parents, "It is a book about getting dirty, getting a little wet, but mostly it is about being engaged." There are recipes for mud pies, mud volcanoes, and mud paint. There are directions for making fairy boats, birdseed cookies, stick forts, and art supplies made from sticks, berries, and vines. There are even instructions for making mud indoors when the weather won't cooperate. How much messy fun would that be?



Muddy Boots: Outdoor Activities for Children

by Liza Gardner Walsh (Down East Books, 2015) All ages.

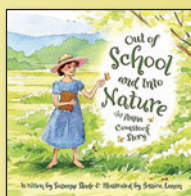
We all know how much little kids love to look at earth moving machines, and the excavator on the cover of *Dig* is a big one. This basic board book isn't just about machines, however, but about all manner of digging — the squirrel who hides a nut under the leaves, a child who digs a hole at the beach, and that excavator that makes the hole where the skyscraper grows. The *National Geographic* photos are beautiful. Children who like *Dig* will also enjoy *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel*, Virginia Lee Burton's classic hole-digging story — always a favorite.



Dig by National Geographic Kids ("Look and Learn" series, *National Geographic*, 2015) Ages 1–4.

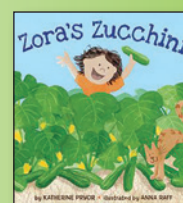
Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel by Virginia Lee Burton (Houghton Mifflin, 1939) Ages 2–7.

"One of my joys was going barefoot from early spring until late autumn." Throughout her long life, Anna Comstock loved to observe and experience nature and to share it with the world. One of the first women to graduate from Cornell University, Anna became a passionate writer, artist, and educator who started a nature study program for teachers in New York State to promote interest in nature and farming. *Out of School and Into Nature: The Anna Comstock Story* is one of several recent books for children about women scientists. How refreshing to read about Anna, who until the end of her days enjoyed feeling the squish of mud between her toes!



Out of School and Into Nature: The Anna Comstock Story by Suzanne Slade, illustrated by Jessica Lanan (Sleeping Bear Press, 2017) Ages 5–10.

Zora is bored on the third day of summer vacation and when she spies some free zucchini plants ("Z, like me") she piles them in her bike basket and rides home to start a garden. Her exceptionally tolerant family eats zucchini for breakfast, lunch, and dinner through July, but by August their good will has run dry and the garden is producing madly. It's perfect timing for a Garden Swap! Zora's neighbors enjoy her zucchini, and Zora's family benefits from traded plums and peppers, tomatoes and potatoes. *Zora's Zucchini* is a delightful story for little ones about growing food, building community, and having fun.



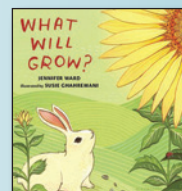
Zora's Zucchini by Katherine Pryor, illustrated by Anna Raff (Readers to Eaters, 2015) Ages 3–7.

On the Farm, At the Market takes the reader behind the scenes early in the morning as a Farmers' Market sets up shop. It's Zora's zucchini stand on a larger scale, from set up to clean up well into the evening. We visit a vegetable farm, a dairy farm, and a mushroom cellar, following the workers from the fields to the market, and finally to the Busy Bee Café for some Market Pie at the end of a long day. Along the way there are friends to meet and music to dance to in this short tribute to both the hard work and joy that goes into making a Farmers' Market happen.



On the Farm, At the Market by G. Brian Karas (Henry Holt, 2016) Ages 3–8.

What Will Grow? is a guessing game with rhyming clues. What will grow from a seed that is "fluffy white, taking flight"? It's a dandelion! Susie Gharemani's bright gouache illustrations of backyard animals, flowers, trees, and worms (the best part of rich soil) mirror the clues and lead at last to a beautiful garden. Several spectacular fold-out pictures show plants that grow high in the sky, deep underground, or in cultivated rows in the garden. There's also a guide for how and when to plant some familiar seeds: sunflowers, tomatoes and — for the most patient children — acorns!



What Will Grow? by Jennifer Ward, illustrated by Susie Gharemani (Bloomsbury, 2017) Ages 2–6.