

Rub-a-Dub-Dub, Artist in the Tub

Cost: About \$5

Mess factor: Minimal (contained in bathtub or bathroom sink)

Suggested location: Bathtub or bathroom sink (a white or light-colored sink or tub is best so the color will show)

Experiences your children will have

- Mixing colors
- Noticing color change in the water

Materials

- 2–4 small spray bottles or empty soap dispensers
- Food coloring or liquid watercolor
- Towels (for cleaning up and drying off)

Before you get started: Prepare the materials beforehand by filling the bottles or soap dispensers with water and adding a few drops of color to each.

Beginning

This activity can be done leaning over the bathtub or sink or in the tub. Fill the sink/tub with a small amount of lukewarm water. Offer your toddler the spray bottles or soap dispensers filled with colored water, and invite them to spray or pump water into the sink/tub. **Be sure to always closely supervise children using water.**

Middle

Give your toddler time to explore the bottle and figure out how to squeeze the lever to make the water come out. If your child becomes frustrated, gently offer to show them how to squeeze it (your child might need to use two hands). As your child sprays water on to the walls of the tub or sink, comment on the colors and describe how the colors drip down the wall and what happens when the colors mix. Join in the play by grabbing another bottle/dispenser and adding to the colors on the wall. Be sure to trade and swap bottles if your child makes that request.

End

Let your toddler know it is almost time to clean up and dry off, and give them a specific choice (e.g., “It is almost time to clean up and dry off. You have time to do two more sprays or three more sprays”). Count the sprays together and remind your child when he or she makes a final spray.

Cleanup

Dry your child off, and then wipe up any water that may have splashed on to the floor. Dump and rinse the bottles/dispensers and store them for use again at another time. Rinse the bathtub/sink to wash away any lingering colors.

Younger children

While they may not be able to squeeze spray bottles or pump the soap dispensers, younger children will enjoy splashing around in the water. Offer them scoops, cups, or funnels so they can explore filling and dumping the water.

Older children

Older children also enjoy exploring and mixing the color water and may be able to assist in preparing the bottles/dispensers. Prompt color mixing by saying something like “I wonder what would happen if we sprayed my color and your color at the same spot. What would the color look like then?” They could also mix colors using other materials, such as eye droppers or turkey basters.

Hints

- Place rugs and/or towels around the edge of the bathtub to minimize the possibility of slipping and lessen concern over the floor getting messy.

More!

Use spray bottles/soap dispensers with colored water outside on wooden fences, in the snow, or on pavement. Children will have more space to explore the colors and notice how they are mixing and blending together.

Special needs accommodations

Spray bottles and soap dispensers can be challenging for children to use while they are still developing strength in and control of their hands and fingers. Alternatively, you can use squeezable bottles (e.g., recycled, washed ketchup or salad dressing bottles) with colored water. Even if children aren't able to squeeze the water out, they can tip the bottle upside down and watch a slow stream of colored water trickle out. Or try bins or pitchers of colored water that children can scoop and mix or use a large paintbrush to dip in to paint the tub/sink.