School is out for summer and that means looking for interesting, entertaining, and healthy ways to keep the kids occupied. The backyard is a great place for kids to have fun. In no time at all and without spending your hard-earned dollars, you can create enough activities to keep them occupied for days on end. The key is to keep it simple; think like a kid. Put on the sprinkler or pull out the kiddie pool. No matter what size, they’ll find something to do with even a small amount of water. Haul out the sports equipment and set up a wild world of sports, letting them move through a number of activities. Create sidewalk or driveway art or let the kids do those messy projects you’ve avoided indoors that involve chiseling a sand block to get to dinosaur “bones.” Invite the neighborhood kids over for a friendly baseball game. Put on a talent or fashion show. Create an obstacle course or triathlon of running laps around the yard, biking up and down the block, and climbing a tree house. Make a lemonade stand and sell popcorn along with it. Let them set up a tent in the yard (the easy to assemble kind with spring-loaded poles). If you have a projector, make it an outdoor movie night. If they’re old enough to handle a hammer and nails, let them make a simple structure; or pound a few nails into an old board—just enough to get them embedded—and then let them hammer away. Budding gardeners? Let them weed and pick a few pretty flowers to press into a scrapbook. Give them one of your old cameras and let them get creative with nature, or portraits of their friends. Print images and frame in cheap frames they decorate.

With all that activity, you’ll need wholesome snacks to fuel the gang. Snacks like popcorn. Popcorn is a whole grain, something you’ll feed good serving to your hungry bunch. It’s economical, costing mere pennies per serving. And popcorn is versatile and can be topped with any number of flavorings.

Looking to spice up your popcorn? Here are a few topping favorites:

- Garlic salt
- Parmesan cheese
- Thyme
- Cumin
- Oregano
- Dry taco seasoning mix
- Dry ranch-style seasoning mix
- Lemon pepper
- Italian herbs: oregano, basil, marjoram, thyme, and crushed rosemary.
- French herbs: marjoram, thyme, summer savory, basil, rosemary, sage, and fennel
- Cinnamon, brown sugar, nutmeg

For more simple and tasty popcorn recipes, visit www.popcorn.org