



More than meets the eye

What does it take to make a Kinderboard?



Kinderboards look deceptively simple. Developed for use in Waldorf early childhood classrooms they're a simple but rather clever concept for developing a child's balance, stimulating their vestibular system and helping them gain a deeper awareness of their body and body parts. However, as is often the case with many of the world's most enduring toys things are never quite what they seem.

A Kinderboard's hidden cost and complexity begins with the raw material used in its manufacture. Each board is made using Beech plywood; a heavier, denser timber than other cheaper options. This ensures it's both strong and durable and thus will endure plenty of energetic play. The timber used is also FSC certified. This means it's often more expensive than untraceable non-sustainability harvested alternatives.

However, before a board can be shaped, its plywood must first be manufactured. This process is surprisingly labour-intensive. It involves kiln drying raw logs until their moisture content falls below 2%, cutting thin veneer sheets from each log and then layering and gluing these sheets by hand to form plywood panels.

Kinderboards then begin their journey through the factory. This starts with each plywood panel being cut into rectangular shapes. Super-heated steam is used to soften each shape at a temperature of more than 130°C. The softened timber is then carefully bent using a custom built shaping form. The form holds the plank under tension until the softened wood cools and hardens into its final curve.

It takes almost an hour to bend and set each board. This process involves expensive industrial steam presses that can only bend one board at a time. This obviously limits the volume of boards you can make in a day. Furthermore, not all planks survive the shaping process and must be discarded.

Raw planks that made through the shaping process are then sanded and shaped by hand to ensure a smooth and elegant finish. This includes the addition of each board's deceptively simple corner curves. Adding these finishing touches is a surprisingly time-consuming task.

The completed Kinderboard is then stained and lacquered. This involves up to four coats per board. Each coat is applied by hand and then hand sanded before the next is applied. Kinderfeets uses ecologically friendly stains and lacquers. These are more expensive than solvent-based alternatives.

A final quality review identifies and removes any boards which have developed significant cosmetic blemishes before packing and export. Additional costs associated with testing it to Australian standards, importing this relatively bulky toy and distributing it nationwide add to the final price.

However, despite these complex and often expensive manufacturing processes, Kinderfeets Kinderboards are up to 20% cheaper than competitive products available in Australia. The simple things in life really aren't always as simple as they seem!