

Facts and Folklore

Ash trees are deciduous, and the emergence of ash and oak leaves is thought to be a predictor of the summer weather: 'Ash before oak you're in for a soak' (a summer of mixed weather) 'Oak before ash you're in for a splash' (drought).

Before steel production, ash was used extensively for boat and car chassis frames, tool handles and sports equipment such as snooker cues and tennis rackets.

These days ash is used for wood veneers and flooring.

There are about 50 different species of them in the whole world. Three of these species grow in Europe. In the UK, it is mainly the "common ash" that grows. Ashes form a genus and are related to olive trees.

Witches were reputed to use ash branches to help them fly.

Very young ash fruits, known as keys, can be boiled and pickled for a substitute to capers.

An evenly shaped ash leaf was thought to bring luck: 'The even ash leaf in my hand, the first I meet shall be my man'.

As a wood fuel it is thought to be best while still green but of little use when dry:

"Burn ash-wood green, 'tis fire for a queen;
burn ash-wood sear, 'twill
make a man swear".

Ash trees through the seasons

Watch the short video about a year in the life of an ash tree.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z0JdCENAXeQ>

Divide a plain drawing sheet into four equal parts. These four parts will symbolise the seasons.

Draw or paint each season what you think characterises ash in that period.

Add texture to the painting using fresh or dried ash leaves, keys, bark or other parts of the tree.

In autumn the European ash trees lose their leaves. In spring new ones grow. On other continents there are ash trees that keep their leaves over the winter. Ashes form flowers, from which the seeds then develop. They have a wing like the seeds of the maple tree. This allows the seeds to fly a little way from the trunk. This allows the tree to reproduce better.

Ash wood is very heavy, firm and elastic. It is therefore considered the best European wood for the handles of tools, i.e. hammers, shovels, picks, brooms and so on. But it is also suitable for sports equipment such as sledges or baseball bats, and for building ships. However, the wood does not like moisture so you should not leave these objects outside at night.



Practical Uses

Ash wood slice spinner

You'll need:

Slices of ash with a hole drilled in the middle, sticks, sharp knife or vegetable peeler, marker pens, glue

Instructions:

Using the pen, carefully draw a spiral starting from the centre of the ash slice and working outwards. Take a short length of stick and remove bark using the peeler (or knife, if using) and create a point at one end. Push the stick through the centre of the ash slice, adjusting the width of the stick using the peeler if necessary, or glue it into place.

You now have your finished Spinner.



Fairy and elf houses

You'll need:

Sharp knife or vegetable peeler, chunks of ash wood in different lengths, pens or paints and brushes, glue, small sticks

Instructions:

Use a sharp knife to shape the roof of the elf and fairy houses.
Paint the roof and stick on a small piece of wood as a chimney
Use paint to design the windows and doors of the house

Woodland animals

You'll need:

Sharp knife or vegetable peeler, pieces of ash wood in different lengths, pens or paints and brushes, glue, string

Instructions:

Cut a slice from the wood to create the face of the animal. Using an pen and or paint, add your creatures features such as face, spines for the hedgehog. Stick a short piece of string on the base as a tail and leave to dry. For the woodland foxes, use a sharp knife to whittle the shape and when finished add features with a pen.

Practical uses

Making a catapult

You'll need:

A Y shaped, forked piece of wood trimmed to a comfortable hand size, sharp knife or vegetable peeler, piece of elastic – or any thick, stretchy material that you have on hand can be converted to an effective firing mechanism, small piece of leather or thick material to make the 'firing' pouch, string or cotton thread or dental floss.

Instructions:

Find an appropriately shaped piece of wood in a V shape with a length below that can be a handle by cutting some wood off at a junction of branches. Using a sharp knife, remove the bark from the wood. Cut two notches on the top of each prong. Cut two matching sized length of elastic approximately the length of the frame and attach around the notch by winding it around the top, securing in place using thread, repeat on the other side. Cut the pouch material approximately 10cm x 5cm. Using a hole punch, make a hole at each end of the rectangle. Thread the end of elastic through one of the holes you have punched in the pouch. Knot it tightly to the outer edge, fastening it tightly with the thread. Repeat with the opposite hole. The catapult is now completed with the bands on either side and the pouch in the middle.

<https://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Sling-Shot>



Den building

All children love making dens and it is a fun way to spend time outside interacting with plants and nature. There are no rules on how to make a den. Some tips would be to create two triangles or wigwam shapes and stretch a longer branch across the two. Next step would be to stretch branches across and when there is enough of a structure this can be covered with bracken or other things that can be found. A sturdy tree trunk with branches leaned against it can also be the start of a great natural shelter.

Practical uses

Picture frames

There are endless ideas for sticks. An easy and quick idea is to create a frame and use this to do your own woodland weaving.

Equipment:

Sticks, twine/ string, fabric strips, natural found objects

Instructions:

Firstly, create a frame, overlapping 4 sticks, use the string to attach the sticks into a square shape. Once you have done this attach strings in both directions to create the basic structure for weaving. Take time to collect natural objects in your area and then weave these and piece of the fabric through the strings in the frame. This work can be a bit fiddly but can add strength by weaving twigs in and out of the string and use the thread to attach leaves and other items in place.



Boat building

Equipment:

Corks
Pieces of wood / twigs
Twine/ string
Glue
Sail materials- cloth, leaves, feathers.

Instructions:

The boats can be constructed in a variety of ways and children can experiment with a range of natural materials to find out which works best. Take the boats to the nearest local outdoor water to test them out – or make a giant puddle or temporary pond of your own.

Make a star

Equipment:

Twigs, string, scissors or knife

Instructions:

This is a simple but effective project. Using short lengths of twigs create two triangles, attaching the ends together using string. Overlay one of the triangles with the other until you are happy with the star shape then fasten together using string.

Facts and Folklore

Blackberries are also known as brambleberries, brambles, dewberries, thimbleberries.

Blackberries make excellent facepaints!



It has been said that when the devil was cast out from heaven by St Michael, he landed in a bramble bush and cursed it; this is what made the blackberries unpalatable after the 29th September (St Michael's day). Foragers were advised to avoid eating blackberries picked after this date.

The dark colour of the blackberry shows that it has one of the highest antioxidant levels of all fruits and they are best eaten raw to get the full benefits.

BANANA AND BLACKBERRY ICE CREAM

Ingredients

3-4 large bananas, 200g frozen blackberries, maple syrup or honey to taste

Instructions:

Peel and chop the bananas into rounds, then lay them out on a lined baking tray and freeze overnight until solid. Once you're ready to make the ice cream, throw the banana pieces and frozen blackberries into a high-speed blender and whizz them up together until smooth. You'll probably find that the fruit breaks up into a crumbly texture and you need to scrape down the sides several times but be patient and continue to blend it until it becomes smooth and creamy.

Taste the mixture and add maple syrup or honey to taste if needed. This will really depend on the ripeness of both the bananas and blackberries - the riper they are the sweeter it will be. Once smooth, serve immediately or pop into a cake tin or plastic tub and return to the freezer until ready to serve.



How to freeze blackberries

Gently place the blackberries into a colander, and rinse in cool water.

Remove stems, leaves and any damaged berries.

Spread the blackberries out on a baking tray in a single layer and place in the freezer.

Once frozen, transfer to a freezer bag or container.

Recipes

Playful springboards: BLACKBERRY

JAM TECHNIQUES

The rule is to weigh the blackberries and add the same amount of sugar.

You can also add a tablespoon of lemon juice to enhance the flavour.

Elderberries make a good addition to this jam. For a lower sugar version use a 1:3 ratio of sugar to fruit.

As blackberries are high in pectin, a good set will be achieved if the mixture is cooked for long enough.



BLACKBERRY JAM

Ingredients

Blackberries, sugar, lemon Juice

Method

Place a plate in the freezer for the setting point test. Wash the blackberries and add the sugar to them in the pan. Mash the fruit as it heats to release the flavour. Add the lemon juice. It will need to be carefully watched and stirred as it reaches the boil - beware hot sugar! Keep the mixture simmering until it turns more gel-like and glossy. Take the cool plate from the fridge and put a spoonful of the mixture onto the plate to test the set.

If the jam wrinkles as you run your finger through the cooling mixture, it is ready. If not, cook for longer. Once your jam has set, leave to cool and pour in to sterilised jam jars.

DAMPERS

Ingredients

Self-raising flour, lemonade, jam, marshmallows, raisins, chocolate spread.

Method

Fill a bowl with self-raising flour and add lemonade to create the consistency of a soft dough.

Take a stick with the end whittled, washed or covered in foil (to provide a 'clean' cooking surface).

Wrap the dough around the end of stick and ensuring it is secure and creates a spiral or a tube around the stick.

Place the dough end of the stick above the campfire, close to the heat but not directly in the flames.

Once your dough is cooked, slide it from the stick - it will be hot! Add a bit of butter to the inside and some campfire made and foraged blackberry jam.

Experiment with all sorts of fillings for the dampers including mini marshmallows, chocolate spread, raisins and more - get creative!



Recipes

Recipes

BLACKBERRY FLAPJACKS

Ideal for picnics or outdoor adventures!

Ingredients

350g blackberries, 25g caster sugar, 250g oats,
140g butter, 50g light brown sugar
140g golden syrup

Method

Preheat the oven to Gas mark 5/ 190°C.

Grease and line an 18cm baking tin.

Cook the blackberries and caster sugar in a pan until soft;
set aside and let them cool

In another pan melt all the other ingredients together.

Press half of the oat mixture into the tin; layer the
fruit on top and finish with the remaining oat mix.

Bake for 25 minutes and cut them
before moving them from the
tin once they are cool.



PLUS!

Add mashed blackberries to a
pancake batter.

Add blackberries to the bottom of
cupcake cases before adding the batter.

Make a warm sauce with fruit, sugar and
vanilla essence to pour over ice-cream.

Add to smoothies and milkshakes for
a zing of colour and flavour.

What else?

HAPA ZOME

The strong pigment of blackberries
makes them ideal for Hapa Zome, the art of
mark making using plant pigments.

Collect blackberries and other richly pigmented
leaves and flowers, and arrange them in patterns
onto half of a rectangle of cotton cloth.

Fold the cloth in half, to completely cover the plants
and crush them by bashing them with a stone or
a hammer.

On unfolding the cloth, deeply coloured
marks will be left behind on each side
of it.

Playful springboards: BLACKBERRY

Practical Uses

BLACKBERRY PAINT

The colour of blackberries is so strong it makes an ideal paint. Collect blackberries and other brightly pigmented berries, taking care not to pick any poisonous plants. Use a pestle and mortar to mash out the colour, adding water if needed or a beaten egg yolk. Push the pulpy liquid through a tea strainer to make the mixture smooth. Use the resulting liquid to create your art.

BLACKBERRY PLAYDOUGH

Warning – not edible 

You need

2 parts plain flour, 1 part salt, handful of blackberries for colour, tablespoon of cooking oil, 1 part water

Method

Mix together the flour and salt. Crush the blackberries to a soft pulp. Stir the blackberries and oil into the flour and salt with enough water to make a thick soft dough and knead until smooth.

Make Pretend Ice Cream Cones

Cut out a large circle of card then cut it in half. Draw a crisscross texture across the semi-circles. Roll each semi-circle into a cone and hold in place with sticky tape.

Dyeing with blackberries

This is very messy so do it outdoors, or protect your surfaces!

You need

2 cups of blackberries, ½ cup of salt, water, fabric

Method

Simmer 2 cups of blackberries and 4 cups of water over a low heat for one hour. Strain the berries from the liquid and return the liquid to the pot. In a separate bowl or bucket mix ½ cup of salt and 8 cups of water. Soak the fabric in the salt mixture for one hour then rinse it with cold water. Add the damp fabric to the berry liquid in the pot and bring to the boil. Leave it on a low heat for one hour (watching it carefully) then remove from the heat. For a darker hue, leave the fabric to soak for a few hours with the heat off. Rinse out the excess dye and hang to dry. Wash the fabric with similar dark colours, as the dye will wash out and the colours will fade over time.

FORAGING

Foraging for wild fruit might be a new idea for the young people you are working with. It can be great fun and give them chance to engage with nature and work as a team towards a goal such as collecting fruit for a specific recipe or activity. You may like to take this a bit further and introduce the idea of a scavenger hunt. These can be organised with an element of competition: first group back having found everything or the most unusual finds. The essential idea with a scavenger hunt is that young people are sent out into an agreed area either in teams or individuals with a list of things to find or challenges to do and come back with evidence they have completed them.



Foraging



Facts and Folklore

In the past, druids would use Scots pine during the winter solstice to draw back the Sun by building and burning large bonfires. It was also traditional to decorate the trees with shiny objects and light. This may have been the beginning of the tradition of Christmas trees and yule logs.

Pine trees were often used for shipbuilding due to the properties of having high resin in the wood. There was a superstition that said that Pine trees should not be felled if they were to be used for shipbuilding during the waning of the moon. It was felt that the tidal influence of the moon would affect the resin content of the wood. Even today loggers pay attention to the moon.

CAUTION

There are some species of pine tree that produce pine nuts. These can be purchased in shops and are used in baking and cooking, for example pine nuts are a key ingredient in pesto served with pasta.

It is not advisable to collect and eat pine nuts as not all of them are edible. 

Some are mildly toxic and cause tingling metallic taste in the mouth when eaten.

Conifers are trees that produce their seeds through cones. The cones are quite easily spotted and help to identify the tree as a conifer. Most of the conifer trees are evergreen however, there are a few such as the larch that are deciduous.

The conifer's needles are in fact its leaves. Conifers drop their cones in autumn and foraging for pinecones and other cones is easy.

In the UK, two species of native conifer tree produce cones: Scots pine and common juniper.

There are 10 yew trees in Britain that are said to pre-date the 10th Century.

CAUTION

It is possible to make a tea from pine needles, for example in Sweden, people use green pine needles as tea and call it tallstrunt. However, not all pine needles can be used so great care is required particularly as all parts of the yew tree are poisonous and can kill humans if eaten. Even sleeping beneath a yew tree has been said to be dangerous. Pine is more reputed for its smell and the fun to be had with pine cones as below.

Recipes

Practical Uses

The most popular use of pines is to make decorations from pinecones, and this extends to a wide variety of fun craft ideas. As a wonderful free resource that can be collected from the ground in the autumn, pinecones can be the starting point for a great number of projects.

PINE CONE WREATH

Equipment:

Pinecones, glass vase, paint, glitter, ribbons
wire coat hanger or wreath made from willow,
thin flexible wire, scissors

Instructions:

Shop-bought wreaths often include pinecones, but they are very easy to make. Leave a willow circle (see the Willow Playful Springboards for instructions) or use wire such as an old coat hanger. Attach thin wire to your pinecones and wrap them around the wreath.

Leave the cones natural, or paint them / add glitter to them before you wire them onto the wreath. Once the circle is covered with pinecones, it is now ready to add a ribbon and attach to your door.

PINE CONE ANIMALS

Equipment:

Pinecones, felt, scissors, glue, thin wire,
Playdough, stick on googly eyes, cotton
wool, pipe cleaners

Instructions:

Taking inspiration from the pictures, or using your own imagination, use the basic pinecone for the body of the animal or insect. Add the other features using a range of craft materials such as felt to create eyes or wings that can be glued in place, using pipe cleaners for legs and have fun creating!



Playful springboards: CONIFERS

Onelittleproject.com



Practical Ideas: Pinecone bird feeder

Equipment:

- Pinecones
- Fat (such as lard)
- Bird seed
- String

Instructions:

Attach the string to the top of the pinecone, knotting it in place. Melt the fat in a pan and once it has turned to liquid add the bird seed. Leave to cool until starting to reset. Pour and press the fat and seed mixture into the pinecone. Leave the cones to dry on greaseproof paper. Once dried, hang the seeds for the birds to enjoy!



Somethingturquoise.com

Practical Uses

PINECONE FIRE STARTERS

Equipment:

- Dry pinecones
- Wax (e.g. candle or crayon stubs, paraffin, or beeswax)
- A double boiler / Bain Marie
- Tongs
- Foil or wax paper
- Essential oil (optional)
- Crayons to add colour (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS:

Melt the wax in a double boiler; if you do not have a double boiler, place some water in the bottom of a high sided saucepan and place a heat proof bowl (metal or glass) on top. The bowl should not touch the water while the wax is melting. Add the crayon pieces and essential oils if using, to the wax – do not leave it unattended. Using tongs, taking care as the wax will be very hot, dip the pinecone into the wax ensure thorough coverage. Hold the cone over the bowl until it stops dripping and then place it on a piece of foil or wax paper to dry. Once dry, the cones are ready to use. They can be added to the fire with some kindling and then lit.

Practical Uses

TABLE CENTRE PIECES

Equipment:

Pine cones, glass vase, paint, glitter, ribbons

Instructions:

For an easy decoration, collect some pine cones and decorate them with paint and or glitter. Present these pine cones in a clear vase in the middle of your table.

PINECONE TORCH

Equipment:

Pinecones, pine resin (found in trees where a branch has been damaged; scrape into a container), axe/ pen knife, 'green' / living stick for the torch handle

Instructions:

Melt the resin until runny and carefully dip the pinecone in until it is completely covered with resin. Using the axe or knife, split one end of the green stick into a cross and bend back 4 'arms' and firmly push the pinecone in to the four arms at the end of the handle. Place the other end of the stick into the ground. Light the torch. If carrying the torch, hold it tilted away as hot, melting resin will drip!

MEET THE TREE

Equipment:

Blindfolds, a small grove of trees

Instructions:

Choose an area with plenty of trees but few other ground cover hazards. In pairs, one player is blindfolded, the other acts as guide. The guide disorientates their partner by rotating them a few times and walking them around the area, carefully leading them by the arm towards a tree to 'meet' it. Once there they can touch and smell the tree to get to know it; feeling for and making a mental note of the lumps, bumps and branches. They are then disorientated again and guided back to a central point between a group of trees that includes their tree, where they remove the blindfold. The player who was blindfolded then tries to find the tree that they met.

The players then swap roles.

PINECONE TARGET

Equipment:

Pinecones, three concentric circles for a target, drawn on the ground with a stick or chalk.

Instructions:

Each player needs three pinecones and stands a set distance away from the target circles. Aim the pinecones into the circle. The smallest circle is worth the most points - or ask children to 'collect' a set number of points by aiming for specific circles (e.g. 14 points from 2, 5 and 7 points).

Games

Playful springboards: DANDELION

Facts and Folklore



Dandelions are delightful golden wonders for children and young people to discover. They are sometimes called “fairy clocks” because their flowers open and close with changing light levels: the flowers open in the morning and tend to close up at night.

Having flowered and then been pollinated, dandelion heads close and seeds start to develop inside the closed-up head. The seeds are the fruit with each seed having a **pappus**, a set of feathery bristles that help it float away on the wind.

Most young people and children know that you can ‘tell the time’ with these seed heads. When the dandelion flower turns to seeds, it’s a great opportunity to tune into playing with the wind as a method of seed dispersal.

Children can pretend telling the time using a dandelion clock. Having asked the clock what the time is, the child then begin to blow away the seeds, counting each breath, once the seeds have all gone that is the time.

Dandelions can predict the future!
The number of seeds remaining after blowing away the seeds in one big breath predicts the number of children you will have...



Pappus

Poem

The Dandelion
by Janet L. Niehaus

I picked a faded dandelion
And blew it in the air
Its tiny little parachutes
Went floating everywhere. They caught the wind
And danced awhile
Bending to and fro
In splendid ballerina style. Finally as the wind grew still
They floated back to earth
And bedded in the dark warm soil
To start their new rebirth. When next summer comes
And dandelions are everywhere
I’ll pick another faded flower
And blow it in the air

Playful springboards: DANDELION

Recipes

SAVOURY IDEAS



Include well washed young dandelion leaves in salads.

Replace spinach with young dandelion leaves in meals such as omelettes.

DANDELION FAIRY CAKES

After collecting a couple of handfuls of flowers, remove all the yellow petals and discard all the green parts as these are bitter. Wash thoroughly. Add the clean flower petals to any sponge cake recipe to add a golden colour and bake according to your recipe.

Once cooled, add frostings and for fun, find edible flowers for the topping- for example, violets, nasturtiums or roses.

DANDELION BISCUITS

Ingredients

170g plain flour, 2 teaspoons baking powder, ½ teaspoon salt, 1 teaspoon dried herbs such as rosemary, marjoram, thyme, basil or chive, 45g cold unsalted butter, cut into small pieces, half a pint of milk, ½ cup dandelion flowers – pulled off the base

Method

Preheat the oven to 450°F / 230°C. Mix all the ingredients together. Do not overwork the mixture as the batter should be moist and sticky but not smooth.

Use a spoon to place scoops of the mixture onto a greased and lined baking tray, 5cms apart.

Bake until the bottom is browned and the edges are just starting to brown, which will take around 12 minutes.

DANDELION TEA

Collect fresh flowers and leaves and store them in a glass jar, until you are ready to make the tea.

Pour simmering water over a handful of flowers and leaves.

Let the tea infuse until it's cool enough to drink, then strain.

Dandelions are thought to be a good tonic and can act to relieve sluggish digestion. While it can be helpful for some digestive issues, use caution if you have ulcers or chronic health issues and consult a medical professional before using.

Playful springboards: DANDELION

Games

PLAYING WITH THE WIND

Play 'Air Pooch Sticks' – pick a dandelion head and throw it into the air. Whose seed head will fly the furthest?

Dandelion seed heads are characterised by the way they behave in the wind. These games involve interacting and playing with the wind, for example trying to catch floating seed heads. Make the game competitive by pointing out a seed head and racing to be the first to grab it. In spring, chase blossom flowers and in autumn, catch falling leaves.

Folklore has it that luck is given to those who catch a leaf.

'Pappus' is one way that seeds are dispersed but there are other means of seed dispersal by the wind and this can prompt many opportunities for crafting things that fly.

There are lots of ideas on the web but an easy one idea is to create a 'helicopter' from a strip of paper 2-3cm wide with a tear/cut on opposite sides at either end allowing the paper to be slotted together into fish shape.

Launch with a stick which should fall out in mid-air and allow the helicopter to spin to the ground. Finding good launching points can also add to the success and the fun.

References

Maudsley, M, *Playing on the Wildside*, 2009
Playwork Partnerships

WINDY DAY MINDFULNESS

Watching the wind blow clouds across the sky can stimulate and mesmerise children's minds and be used to initiate thought games such as: timing cloud movements, guessing which way the wind is blowing, spotting unusual formations and interpreting what they might represent or resemble.

It can also be very relaxing watching clouds and help support young people's wellbeing.



<http://www.mhileco.co.uk/super-quick-paper-toy-flying-fish/>
Pappus

Playful springboards: DANDELION

Creative arts

DANDELION FLUTES

Dandelion flutes are sometimes called dandelion horns, and they provide a playful way to explore how sound travels by vibrations.

Pick the dandelion and remove the flower head, then blow down the stalk to make a sound. Split the stalk in two from the bottom and notice how the notes played change depending on how long the split is.

DANDELION ART

The golden colour of dandelion flower heads, and their proliferation makes them ideal for outdoor art projects with nature.

For inspiration, explore the work of nature and ephemeral artists such as Andy Goldsworthy, Christo, Patrick Dougherty and Agnes Denes.

HAPA ZOME

The high water content in the leaves and flowers of dandelions make them ideal for Hapa Zome art. Place the plant onto one half of a piece of cotton fabric.

Fold the fabric over the flower. Firmly 'bash' the fabric with a smooth stone or a small hammer, until the plant dyes begin to show through. On unfolding the fabric, a dandelion print appears!

DANDELION PLAYDOUGH

Ingredients:

A handful of dandelion flowers with the green stalk removed, 235ml boiling water, 120g of flour, 40g of salt, 2tbsp vegetable oil, 1-2 tbsp of cream of tartar.

Method

Mix the hot water and dandelions in a blender until pulped. Add the oil, salt, cream of tartar and the flour. You will need to mix the dough with your hands. If it is too sticky, add more flour.

After that it is ready to use as a dough to make creations.



Facts and Folklore

In Autumn, the dog rose produces bright red berries called hips.

During WW2 the UK Ministry of Health and County Herb Committees organised the collection of rose hips for the production of rose hip syrup. This syrup is very high in vitamin C and was a good substitute for lack of fresh fruit and was also given to ward off colds.

Children used to play tricks on each other by taking the insides of rose hips and putting them down each other's shirts. The insides are like itching powder so rosehips were sometimes known as itchy-backs, cow-itches and ticklers.

The Grimm Brothers' heroine Sleeping Beauty is often known as Rose Red or Briar Rose. In Slovak, Czech and Hungarian she is known by the nicknamed form of Dog Rose, which is Csipkerózsika in Hungarian, Šípková Ruženka in Slovak, Šípková Ruženka in Czech.

The Latin name of Dog Rose is *Rosa canina*. 'Canina' is derived from the ancient Greek belief that a tincture from the root was a cure or the bite of a rabid dog!

It's likely that the plant's sharp spines, which resemble a dog's canine teeth and have the potential to damage the skin inspired the common name.

The dog rose is also known as the cock bramble, wild rose, hip rose and referred to as 'eglantine' by Shakespeare.

Dog rose is the most widespread of the wild rose species.

The fruit of the dog rose is called rose hip, and it is used in many traditional recipes.

Rose hips contain more vitamin C than lemons.

To store rose petals for later use, it's a good idea to dry them out. Here is how to dry them using an oven:

Collect fresh rose petals in peak bloom that haven't been treated with chemicals or damaged.

Preheat the oven to 200°F.

Wash the petals gently and drain them well.

Line a baking sheet with baking paper, placing the cleaned petals in a single layer on the sheet. Make sure you remove all traces of stems.

Bake the petals until they are dry and break apart like potato crisps. If they still seem flexible, bake for another a few minutes and test again.

Once the petals have dried, store them in an airtight container in a cool, dark place.



Recipes

ROSE HIP SYRUP

Ingredients

1kg rose hips, 3 litres of water, sugar

Method

Trim the hips from their stalks and wash them.

Sterilise a couple of bottles and their tops – you can do this in a hot oven, in the dishwasher or in the microwave.

Roughly chop the rosehips and transfer to a large, heavy based saucepan. Add the water, bring to the boil, then turn the heat down and simmer for 15 minutes.

Strain the mixture through a double layer of muslin cloth, letting the pulp sit for a good half hour so that all the juice passes through.

Wash and reuse the muslin, or use a fresh piece; fold it and pass the strained juice through it again. The double strain is important as it removes anything that could irritate the digestive system.

Measure the rosehip juice back into the cleaned saucepan. For every 500ml, add 325g sugar.

Heat slowly until the sugar has dissolved, stirring constantly and then bring to the boil for 3 minutes, skimming off any scum if necessary.

Immediately pour into the sterilised bottles.

To add colour and fun to summer drinks, add rose petals to ice cube trays and serve with a sprig of mint.

Always strain rose hip recipes twice, through double muslin layers. This ensures no hairs or seeds can be left in the recipe.

ROSE HIP JAM

Ingredients

1kg of wild rose hips, 1 litre of water, 340g sugar, 1 fresh lemon

Method

Wash the hips and remove the leaves and stalks.

Carefully cut each washed and dried rose hip from both sides, open it and remove all the sticky seeds. Do not leave any seeds to end up in the jam.

Place the hips in a heavy based saucepan and boil until soft – around 40 minutes.

Press the mixture through a fine sieve and return it to the rinsed-out pan.

Add the sugar and lemon juice to help preserve the colour. Boil, stirring every few minutes, until the mixture is thick like cream, and glossy.

Test the jam using a cold plate; when it has cooled on the plate it should have a slight movement.

Add to clean, sterilised jars and store in the fridge.

Store rose hip recipes and concoctions in the fridge, especially once they are opened. They should last for around 4 months, unopened.

Rose hips must not be eaten raw. Always strain rose hip juice and remove any hairs or pips that could irritate the digestive system.

Recipes

ROSE PETAL HONEY

Rose petals are antiviral, antibacterial, and antiseptic, qualities that can help to relieve a sore throat.

Ingredients and equipment

Rose petals, honey, sterilised glass jar, wooden spoon

Method

Place the rose petals in a glass jar and cover with honey. Stir to make sure all the petals are covered. Add the sterilised lid and leave to infuse for 6 weeks in a cool place such as a larder or fridge.

Strain off the petals after 6 weeks by pushing through muslin.

Store in a cool place and add to warm water or tea at the first sign of a sore throat.

ROSE PETALS

are edible, and can be added to many dishes to create quirky touches with their scent, texture and colour.

For example, spread peanut butter or jam on toast, and then sprinkle fresh petals on top.

Have fun experimenting with rose petal toppings on crackers and salads, and decorate the edges of plates.

The Dog rose's petals can be used to make tincture or rose water.

An easy cold tea or tincture can be made with dried rose petals. Prepare the tea by pouring boiling water over the petals and letting it infuse overnight.

Strain the liquid through muslin and store in the fridge. This tea is said to help with stomach cramps.

SUGARED ROSE PETAL DECORATIONS

Ingredients

Unsprayed edible rose petals, 1 large egg white, 100g caster sugar - or grind granulated sugar until finely ground but not powdery.

Method

Carefully pluck individual petals from the flowers. Gently wash the petals, trying not to bruise them. Place the petals on kitchen paper and leave them until completely dry.

Place a wire cooling rack on a baking sheet.

Whisk an egg white in a bowl. Spread the sugar onto a plate.

Using a brush, paint each rose petal with the egg white and then place the petal in the bowl of superfine sugar, turning it to coat both sides and sprinkling on extra sugar if necessary, so the petals are completely coated with sugar. Space the candied rose petals apart on a wire rack and leave until dry and hardened.



© Tori Avey

Playful springboards: DOG ROSE

FLOWER NAME CHALLENGE

Flowers are often used as baby names – for example, Jasmine. Beginning with A and working as far through the alphabet as possible, recall a flower name beginning with each letter.

Flower feedback

Use the characteristics of a rose to facilitate feedback after a session playing or working together.

Give everyone time to reflect on their experiences in the group and think about:

THORN: a woe from the day

ROSE: a joy from the day

BUD: something that will happen next (bloom!)

Facilitate the feedback, starting with the 'thorns', then the 'roses' and finally the 'buds', which help the session end on a positive note.

These prompts allow participants think deeply about their experiences and take time to share their emotions.

PASS THE ENCHANTED ROSE

This game is based on the falling petals from the enchanted rose in the story of Sleeping Beauty. Gather several roses (watching out for the thorns).

All the players sit in a circle.

Hand a single rose to the first player, who removes one petal and passes it to the left. The next player should do the same and so on around the circle.

The player who removes the last petal from the enchanted rose is out of the game.

Hand a new rose to the remaining players and repeat the same process.

Keep playing until the last player picks the last rose petal.

Games + activities

FLOWER PRESSING

Equipment

Flowers, pieces of paper, heavy books

Instructions

Choose a selection of flowers to press – it could be whole flowers, petal, buds or leaves. Arrange them between sheets of paper and then place heavy books on top of the paper.

After a few days check progress – keep checking until the flowers are flat and completely dried out.

Use the flowers for craft projects.

MINDFULNESS

Go out for a walk with a friend, and look for a dog rose. While searching, notice the ambient sounds, smells and the sights on the route. Share your thoughts with your friend. Once the dog rose has been found, stop and inspect it, silently, for a minute. Try not to think about anything but the rose and its unique features.

Now, take a little piece of the plant in your hand and hold it gently. Sit down, close your eyes for two minutes and tell your friend what you feel.

Finally, deeply inhale the smell of the flower. Lie down, silently, for three minutes, being aware of your breathing and your friend's breathing too.

After the mindful observations of a rose, reflect on the experience and write or draw something to express what you saw or felt.

While doing this, listen to some relaxing music and try to focus on doing only this one thing for about 15 minutes.

Once finished, present your work to your mindfulness buddy.

Cooking with Elder

Cooking with elder flowers and berries can be messy but fun. Elder is considered to be full of health-giving properties and has been used medicinally for centuries. Search on-line for more recipes, for example from www.woodlandtrust.org.uk

Elderflower cordial

Ingredients:

2.5 Kg white sugar, 2 unwaxed lemons, 20 fresh elderflower heads, 85g citric acid from chemist

Method:

Put the sugar and 1.5 litres/2¾ pints water into a large saucepan. Gently heat, without boiling, until the sugar has dissolved. Give it a stir every now and again. Pare the zest from the lemons using a potato peeler, then slice the lemons into rounds.

Once the sugar has dissolved, bring the pan of syrup to the boil, then turn off the heat. Fill a washing up bowl with cold water. Give the flowers a gentle swish around to loosen any dirt or bugs. Lift flowers out, gently shake and transfer to the syrup along with the lemon zest and citric acid, then stir well. Cover the pan and leave to infuse for 24 hours. Line a colander with a clean tea towel, then sit it over a large bowl or pan. Ladle in the syrup – let it drip slowly through.

Discard the bits left in the towel.

Use a funnel and a ladle to fill sterilised bottles (run glass bottles through the dishwasher, or wash well with soapy water.

Rinse, then leave to dry in a low oven). The cordial is ready to drink straight away and will keep in the fridge for up to 6 weeks.

Recipe from BBC Good Food online

Elderflower fritters

Ingredients:

2 large Eggs, 100g Plain Flour, 300ml of milk, fresh elderflower heads cleaned, icing sugar, butter, lemon

Method:

Make an ordinary pancake batter whisking the milk, eggs and flour together. Heat butter in a pan. Dip a flower head in the batter and fry the flowers head down in the pan, holding by the stalk. Serve by the stalk, sprinkled with icing sugar and a squeeze of lemon.



Elderberry jam

Ingredients:

500g of elderberries, 400g of jam sugar, 1 tbsp of lemon juice

Instructions:

Begin by putting a plate in the freezer. This will help you test whether the jam is ready later on. Remove the berries from their stems with a fork and wash thoroughly to remove any bits of leaf and stalk. Place the elderberries in a heavy-based pan and gently crush with a potato masher, just enough to release some of the juices, but retain some texture. Add the sugar and lemon juice to the pan and leave to simmer on a low heat. Keep stirring to prevent the jam sticking to the bottom of the pan. Cook down for around 20 minutes, skimming off and discarding any scum which rises to the surface. To test if the jam is at the right consistency, remove the plate from the freezer, and place a small dollop of the jam on the plate. Put the plate in the fridge for a few minutes; if the jam forms a skin it is ready. If it's not, return to the heat and keep repeating the test every 5–10 minutes until ready.

Spoon the jam into sterilised jars and once fully cooled seal the jar and label with the date of production.

The jam will keep in a cool dark place for 1 year.

Once opened, keep in the fridge.

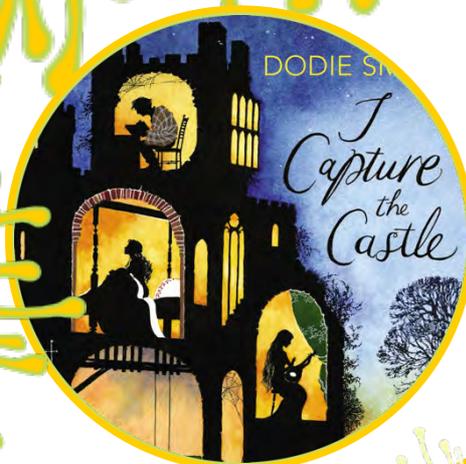


'I Capture the Castle' midsummer ceremony and cake

Towards the end of the book by Dodie Smith, Cassandra celebrates midsummer, makes a garland of flowers, burns salt and herbs, lights a bonfire and eats a ceremonial cake. Try inventing a cake recipe that uses elderflower cordial as a flavouring ingredient, and perhaps elderflower jam in the middle.



Elderflower cake



Elder myths and tales

“Elder is deeply connected with the realms of faery. Sitting under, or more riskily sleeping under, an elder at midsummer was said to enable one to see the faeries or even see them going to their midsummer feast. The danger was being transported into the Underworld and not being able to escape. Elder is certainly associated with a spirit being, or Queen, who is a guardian of the Underworld, where faeries and spirits of the dead reside. Elder is often planted in graveyards and crosses of elder used to be placed on new graves, presumably to help the spirits cross over.”

Incredible Edible Todmorden

In JK Rowling’s Harry Potter series, the most powerful wand in the wizarding world was made from elder, and as one of the three ‘Deathly Hallows’ was said to have been made by Death himself.

Research elder myths and tales, and use them as springboards for spontaneous storytelling and crafts.



Elder tree myths

Using Elder

Elder is a very versatile material. For making simple craft items such as puppets, wands, whistles and fire pipes. It is easy to cut and the pith can be extracted to make a hollow tube that can be used in many ways – see below for just one idea.



Elder crafts

Elder Beads

This is a straightforward task and very satisfying. Use secateurs or a hacksaw to cut long straight lengths of elder (about the thickness of your fingers). Peel or whittle the bark off - or leave it on for a more natural look. Then cut the sticks into smaller, bead sized pieces. Poke out the soft pith in the middle using a tent peg or a bamboo kebab stick. After Spring, the bark on new growth thickens and can be carved into patterns. Thread the beads onto strings to make necklaces, bracelets or decorative hangings.



Playful springboards: GRASS

Facts and Folklore

Grasses make up the world's most significant food source as a grain source for both humans and animals. Available all year round, the play value of grasses is maximised in summer when they are in flower. The largest variety of grass is giant bamboo, which can grow up to 151 feet tall.

TRADITIONAL RHYME

Here's a tree in summer
(hold up seeds on grass stem)
Here's a tree in winter
(remove seeds with an upwards sweep of the hand and show the left over stalk of grass)
Here's a bunch of flowers
(pinch the seeds in a bunch)
And here's the April showers
(throw them in the air)

a rhyme children used as they stripped the grass seeds off the stalk, ready to throw over their friend.

Papyrus (sometimes thought of as a weed) is from the sedge family, a related family to grasses, that grew along the banks of the Nile River. It grew around 3m high and was used to make many essential items. Ancient Egyptians used it to make paper, baskets, sandals, mats, rope, blankets, tables, chairs, mattresses, medicine, perfume, food, and clothes.

Recipes

HAYBOX COOKING: Slow cooking using hay, a DIY thermal cooker.

This is a fun cooking experiment, perfect for outdoor adventures. It is a very economical way to cook food as it relies on so little fuel, and slow cooks during the day ready for a hearty evening meal. It can be useful as a means to cook porridge overnight, if you heat up the porridge on the last embers of the evening's fire, then place it in the hay box overnight.

Equipment:

Hay or other dry fibrous material - old wool jumpers or even a sleeping bag will work; large wooden box with tight fitting lid; cast iron lidded pan; dinner (e.g. stew); source of heat - stove or fire.

Do not cook rice this way!

Instructions:

Line the bottom and sides of the box with hay. Start the recipe in the cast iron pan, on the heat source, for 10-15 minutes to bring to the boil. Place the pan on top of the dry hay and fill the remainder of the box with hay. Close the box lid and leave for the day. Bring the slow cooked stew back to the boil on the heat source and serve.

Recipes

HEDGEHOG BREAD ROLLS

Grains from grass such as rice, maize and millets are the source for flours used in bread making and other food stuffs.

Sugar Cane brings sugar and molasses's to so many recipes and drinks. Wheat seeds can be ground with a small hand mill by the children. The flour made this way can be used for baking a smaller bread or loaves.

Reference: <https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/hedgehog-rolls>

Ingredients:

500 g brown Bread making kit, raisins, flaked almonds, scissors

Instructions:

Follow the recipe to make the bread. Form the dough into a round and shape the snout, leave to rise. Before putting the hedgehog in the oven, use scissors to cut the spikes in to the dough, add two eyes and a flaked almond nose.

Bake in the oven following instructions on the bread mix packet.

Some foods can be cooked or smoked with clean, dried and hygienically stored hay. It is said to give an earthy, smoky flavour to meats and vegetables.



CORN DOLLIES

Once a popular pastime during harvest, dolls, knots and other creations were made from left over corn.

Equipment:

Collect long stems of left-over wheat, or use other grasses and leaves; string or raffia; scissors

Instructions:

Fold a bundle of stems together and twist the top to make a 'head' - tie some raffia round the 'neck' and another piece around the 'waist'. Divide and twist the bottom of the bundle to create two legs. Create a smaller bundle of stems for the arms and attach them across the middle of the dolly.

Weave or tie natural objects in to make hair, clothes and decorations for the dolly.

LEMONGRASS CANDLES

Citronella and lemongrass have such an amazing scent and can be used for candle or torch projects to keep insects – particularly mosquitos – away.

Equipment:

Glass jars or tumblers; citronella or lemongrass essential oil; wax chips or candle stubs; Metal wick plates (or glue the wick to the bottom of the jar); balloons; saucepan; stirrer; pencils to hold up wicks as wax dries.

Instructions:

Glue the wick to the base of the jar, or use the metal wick holder. Wrap the top of the wick around a pencil and balance on top of the jar to hold the wick upright. Melt the wax in a heatproof bowl of water over a saucepan. Once the wax has melted add drops of essential oil. Leave to cool a little. Pour into to the prepared jars. Leave to cool completely. Remove the wick from the pencil once dried and trim the length of wick.

Decorate your jars with tissue paper, acrylic paints or natural materials.

Practical uses

Practical uses

CANE DEN

This practical activity gives an opportunity for collaboration. The den is easy to make and the completed framework is lightweight but relatively stable. The den can be built and used indoors or out.

Equipment:

25 bamboo garden canes; 50 large paperclips; string and pegs; electrical or masking tape; items to cover the frame: fabrics, parachute, flower garlands, large black bin liners, fairy lights, balloons, cushions, leaves, twigs, natural materials.

Instructions:

Pick a cane size to suit the space and children's height, e.g. 1.2m canes for young children, or 2.4m for a den tall enough for adults to stand up inside. You will need 4 or 5 people to make the frame.

Prepare the canes: tape a paper clip to each end of each cane with the electrical or masking tape so that it creates loops.

Make 5 flat cane triangles by tying the corner loops together using the string.

Lay the 5 triangles out on the floor, corner to corner, so that the space in the middle makes a pentagon.

Tie the inner touching corners together using the loops. Take 5 more canes. Hold the triangles upright by their tips, so they are leaning out slightly from the base. Connect the top of each triangle to one of the new canes, until all the tips have a cane between them. The structure will now be free-standing – just!

Tie all 5 remaining canes together at one end. Stand in the middle of the structure, holding the tied end of the 5 canes uppermost.

Open the canes like an umbrella and tie the free ends of the canes to the tips of the triangles.

The structure is now complete and free-standing. It is sturdy, but not strong enough to climb or swing on. Decorate the den with whatever is to hand. Experiment with different materials for making spaces that are, for example, relaxing (cushions, fabrics, dark (black bin liners), etc.

This activity is adapted from the Play Way trainer notebook, developed as part of the EU-funded VIPER project (University of Gloucestershire), first published in 2012 and devised by PACT Birmingham / Play Resource Co.



Games



FIRING PLANTAIN

Equipment:

Collect some plantain leaves.
Ribwort plantain, *Plantago lanceolata* is a very common plant in fields, roadsides and gardens. It is quite distinctive.

Instructions:

Pick a long stalk - tough-stemmed ones work best. Hold with the flower pointing away from you, then bring the base end of the stalk around and fold it in a loop just below the flower.

Grasp the stalks firmly in both hands and pull the loop upwards to the neck of the flower. The stalks are slightly elastic; hopefully, the stalk will snap just below the flower and it will be catapulted forward up to a dozen feet.

TASSELS AND TOKENS

Bundles of grasses, tied at one end and with the addition of feathers and other natural objects, have traditionally been used in many creative and spiritual outdoor projects:

Magic amulets and charms to hang outdoors

Make a team standard, by driving a big stick into the ground and asking the team to decorate it with charms

Make crowns or hats

Weave or plait long green grasses into ribbons

Search online for projects that use grasses for weaving or larger construction projects with the use of bamboo or canes. <http://colorful-crafts.com/how-to-weave-a-simple-grass-basket/>



Playful springboards: GRASS

GRASS MOWING PLAY SPACES

Any grassy space can be mowed in many ways – for example in a spiral shape to create variety and invitations to play. This technique can be used for jumping games (e.g. hopscotch) as well as zoning the play space.

Make the most of mowing (for non-allergenic children) and have lots of fun having grass battles or simply crawling through the long grass, or walking barefoot on grass.

GRASS BLOWING

Equipment:

Pick a flat blade of grass that's as long as your thumbs. You'll get more sound from wide, slightly coarse grass than from thin, fine grass.

Instructions:

Place a piece of grass between your thumbs and press your thumbs together at both the knuckles. Your fingernails facing towards you. The grass should be really taut between the two thumbs and you should be able to see the blade of the grass in the middle of the gap between your thumbs and your knuckles. Place your lips to your thumbs where the gap is and blow. You may need to practice getting a sound from the grass by slightly moving your lips up or down until you get the right adjustment. Try the same effect with a number of different grasses and work out which one works best.

Games

BULL RUSH IN THE MUD

You will need two teams. One team is the Chasers and one is the Runners. The ratio varies according to the size of the playing field and the running speed of the Chasers, but try one Chaser per eight Runners. Chasers and Runners all start at one end of the designated area. The chasers stand in the middle of the field and one Chaser, the leader calls out "Bull Rush!" When the Chaser leader calls out "Bull Rush!" their end of the field becomes "unsafe" and all of the Runners must try to run to the other "safe" end of the field. The Chasers must try to tag as many as possible as they run past. Any player who doesn't run is also able to be tagged because that end of the field is now "unsafe".

All Runners who have been tagged must stand exactly where they were tagged. They should stand with their legs apart but otherwise are not allowed to move from the middle of the field. Runner players may free their fellow Runners by crawling between their legs. If they're tagged by a Chaser while crawling then they don't freeze between their partner's legs but freeze beside them. The game ends if and when all Runner players have been frozen, or all Runners are in the 'safe space'. The winner of the game is then the player who was last to be tagged.



Playful springboards: HAZEL



The ideal time to look to go foraging for hazelnuts, or nutting is September. Once collected arrange the hazelnuts on a baking tray and roast them for 15 minutes at 180°C, 360°F. Place a tea towel in a bowl and pour in the roasted nuts and allow them to cool. Once cool, rub vigorously inside the tea towel to remove the skins. The nuts can then be used in a variety of recipes.

Hazelnut Biscuits

150g hazelnuts, roughly chopped
100g icing sugar, plus extra for dusting
155g butter, softened
200g flour
Zest of ½ an orange
1 egg
Pinch of salt

Heat the oven to 170°C or Gas 3. Beat the butter and sugar together until smooth, add the other ingredients except the egg. Gradually add the beaten egg until incorporated. Roll out the dough to 3mm thickness and cut out the biscuits with a biscuit cutter.

Bake in the oven on a lined baking sheet for 8 minutes. Leave to cool on a wire rack.

Recipes

Coppicing is a means of managing the size of trees and stimulating new growth and involves cutting back the tree at the roots.

Coppicing provides a crop of crafting materials and hazel is particularly useful as it grows in straight lengths that can be used for a variety of projects.

Building a teepee or den building - the lengths of hazel can be used like canes to hold up fabric or tarpaulins. A hazel teepee is also ideal for growing vegetables or flowers such as runner beans or sweet peas. Hazel works especially well for wand making as it is so straight. All you need is a whittling knife or vegetable peeler to strip some or all of the bark off - then decorate to suit.

Practical Uses



Practical Uses

Walking stick / staff

Hazel makes a great walking stick or staff, and can be whittled clean of bark, or markings can be carved out of it.

Staffs were traditionally used by Druids for self-defence.

Forked twigs were often favoured by diviners when looking for water.

Whether a staff, walking stick, divining rod or wand, hazel rods make great springboards for freely chosen, imaginative play ideas and fantasy/ role play.



Story sticks

Chose a straight hazel stick for each person and tie a length of string at one end, or use elastic bands.

Take the stick with you on a walk or trek with some wool. As you go about your walk, be observant and choose things along your walk to remind you of where you were and weave these items on to your stick. By the end you will have a visual memory of your time outdoors that can be used to retell the journey. Young people can also do a larger version of this between trees.

Hazel leaves

Take inspiration from beautiful hazel leaves and make natural artworks.

Sparingly cover the underside of the leaves with a layer of paint and press down onto thick paper to make prints.

Place thin paper over the leaves and rub vigorously with wax crayons to make a relief impression.

In autumn collect dried leaves, crumble them up to create natural 'glitter' for pictures.

Use the leaf shape as a stencil and think about symmetry - hazel leaves are mostly symmetrical when folded.

Look online for more Hazel art inspiration.



Practical Uses



CARVING

Hazel is a useful wood that is often used for carving projects using specialist woodcraft knives and whittlers.

Beginner tutorials are widely available online, along with inspirational projects.

HAZEL 'COOKIES'

Using a hand or electric saw, slice lengths of hazel into thin slices; sand them smooth for use in lots of different projects.

Make buttons or badges by drilling holes through the slices. Decorate the buttons with markers or nail polishes, and string them together with jute string to make jewellery, mobiles or tree decorations.

Make counter games such noughts and crosses, or warm up activities (e.g. writing a name on one side of the cookie and 2 truths and one lie on the back; move around the group talking to others to guess which is the lie).

Make a simple 5- or 6-pointed star shape, using string or wire to join the points together. You could add tissue paper and other objects to make seasonal decorations

Kim's (memory) Game:

Create a large frame on the floor using lengths of hazel and fill with about 15 objects that you find around you.

Ask the group to memorise the objects for a minute and then turn away or close their eyes whilst the leader removes an object.

The next person to be leader is the first one who guesses correctly what has been removed from the frame.

Hazel craft ideas

Cover an old bird house with lengths of hazel, gluing them on to transform it to a log cabin.

Make key holders for your home from suitable shaped twigs.

Create a simple wooden frame with lengths of hazel woven or glued together.



www.richardirvine.co.uk

Facts and Folklore

Why are horse chestnuts so called? Maybe because the crushed chestnut seeds were used to treat sick horses? Is it because the leaf stem is horseshoe shaped when cut?

It is well-known that the horse chestnuts' fruit, its seeds, which is known as a conker has many health benefits and can be used to make medicine. Few know that from its leaves, bark, and the blossoms, medicines for several illnesses and diseases are made. For example, horse chestnuts are used as a medicine for vascular problems. It is interesting to know that there is research on how horse chestnuts can be used against cancer.

All parts of horse chestnut trees contain toxins, so this plant is considered as non-edible plant. The most poisonous part of it are the seeds, which contain TANNIN.

THE GAME OF CONKERS

Equipment:

Conkers, string, a tool to make a hole in the conker – e.g. palm drill, skewer, mattress needle

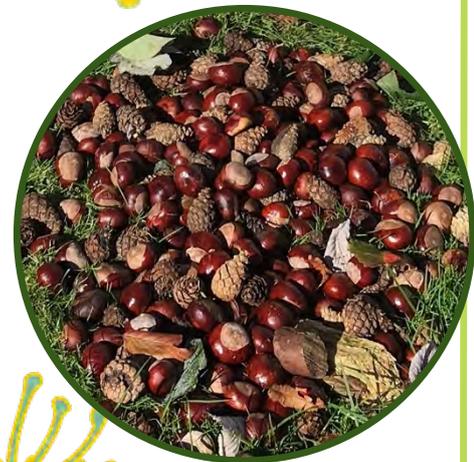
Instructions:

Choose a strong conker and make a hole through the middle of it, then thread the string through the hole and knot the string to secure the conker.

Two players take turns to attempt to smash their opponent's conker so it falls off its string, without damaging their own conker. When taking a turn, the person holds out their conker string at arm's length and the opponent takes a turn at hitting it. If the player misses, they have two more attempts.

Some rules allow the player to keep hitting the conker until there is a miss. The winning conker is called a one-er, when it beats another conker it becomes a two-er, then a three-er and so on.

Try different bashing techniques – shortening the strong, moving closer.



Games

The horse chestnut tree and the seeds are known as conkers, taken from the game that involved conquering another's horse chestnut. In the UK, this game is 170 years old and would have been known originally as conquerors, shortened to 'conkers'.

CONKER BRAINSTORMING

Equipment:

Conkers, Large sheet of paper, markers

Instructions:

Draw the outline of a giant conker on the paper, or draw a whole conker tree with lots of conker outlines hanging from the branches, or a basket full of conkers.

As a group try and think of as many ways of using conkers as possible – you could reward each idea with a conker.

Practical Uses

CONKERS MEDITATION

Equipment:

Conkers – full pockets for everyone

Instructions:

Place conkers in pockets, or in small baskets or bags, so that everyone has their own conkers collection. Sit down comfortably, close your eyes. The meditation leader suggests the next steps, leaving time for a quiet, unhurried experience.

CONKER SMALL WORLD PLAY

Materials:

Whole conkers and some outer shells of conkers, oak acorns and acorn "caps", small sticks or tooth picks, sharp tools for making holes, plasticine or putty, pieces of coloured tissue paper, string, glue, thin brushes and paints – acrylic / markers / nail polishes.

Try not to give children lots of instructions straight away – let them experiment with the resources, and give younger children help to make holes.



Pappus

1. Put your hands in your pockets

(or basket/bag) and dip them in the conkers.

Turn the conkers in your fingers, smooth them, feel their smoothness, sphericity, texture and weight. Pay attention to how your hands feel. Does it feel good? Do you want to keep doing this, or do you want to stop? Are there other sensations in your body? Do the conkers make you feel relaxed, or are you tense, ready for action? Do you feel any emotion - if so, what kind?

2. Choose one conker and carefully examine it using just your hands – think about its size, shape, weight, surface texture. Move it to different parts of your body such as the top of your hand, or your cheek - what does it feel like?

3. Open your eyes and look carefully at the conker - try to describe it to someone who has never seen a conker, finding words for its shape, colour, size, weight – perhaps using comparisons.

4. How do you feel after this exercise? Maybe you have become "friends" with your conker and feel like carrying it with you? Or maybe you want to give it to someone as a gift with a wish attached? Perhaps you'd like to leave it in a pile with other conkers? Or hide it somewhere unexpected?

Instructions:

Combine conkers, acorns and other materials to make people, creatures and animals. Be creative and include fruits, berries and nuts: decorate them, dress them etc. Cut chestnuts and acorns in half and make stable bases from them that will allow the conker people to stand up.

Enrich the play by drawing a map of Horse Chestnut Land for the creatures to live in, or use them as pawns in a board game, use them as story starters, make "avatars" of individuals or their fairy tale allies.

Playful springboards: HORSE CHESTNUT

GET CRAFTY WITH CONKERS

Check out online scrapbook sites (such as Padlet and Pinterest) for hundreds of conker craft ideas – for example, chestnut chains and necklaces, horse chestnut wreaths, sculptures, pen-toppers and much more

DIY WASHING POWDER

Equipment:

3-4 kilos of horse chestnuts

Instructions:

Chop the horse chestnuts into quarters and then mix them vigorously until only small, powdery pieces are visible. Place them on a baking tray and bake in the oven at a low temperature until they are dry – now they can be kept for several months. After they've cooled down, store them in glass containers and your washing powder is ready. There are different ways of making conker washing powder – this recipe is from

www.pechundschwefel.eu/diy-waschmittel-aus-kastanien/

CONKER PETANQUE

Playing the Game

A game for up to 4 players.

Mark a start line with chalk or a length of string. The game leader places the target conker (the jack), on the ground a reasonable distance from the start line. The players take turns to throw or roll their conker towards the jack from behind the start line. When everyone's thrown their first conker, they take turns with their second conker, trying to get as close to the jack as they can. It's perfectly possible to push other players' conkers away from the jack, in attempting to get the closest to it! When everyone runs out of the conkers, the game leader points out the winner – the person who managed to roll their conker the closest to the jack. The winner of that round is awarded one point, and the game continues for the agreed number of rounds.

CONKER PETANQUE

Equipment:

Horse chestnuts, 4 different paint colours plus one very bright colour, flat ground

Making the pieces:

Paint 2 of the conkers in one of four colours. Paint an extra conker in a very vivid colour – this is the 'jack' Every player chooses a colour and gets two chestnuts to play with.

Games

The wood of the horse chestnut has a yellowish to slightly reddish colouring and is light to medium in weight. It is easy to work and is used for carving and for building lighter furniture and boxes. Since it has only low strength and elasticity, it is unsuitable as construction timber. Actually, horse chestnut is valued more for its appearance and not for its timber production.

Games



NIM (SUBTRACTION) GAME

Equipment:
Conkers

Instructions:

This game is for two people, but also works very well in groups if there are sufficient conkers available. Create piles of conkers or rows of conkers (called nim-heaps). The players take it in turns to take away any number of conkers from a pile or row until there are no conkers left. Each turn, players can remove conker only from one pile/row. The winner is the player who takes the final conker.

CONKER RACING

A playful, cheerful and very simple competition that can be played with very small or bigger groups. This game is played barefoot, and develops the muscles of the sole of the foot, while providing fun for the players.

Equipment:

Two small bowls, conkers, timer

Instructions

Fill one bowl with conkers. The task is to move the conkers to the other bowl, using only the toes. If there are a lot of children in the group, form 4-5 groups and choose one person from each group to complete the task. The task can be timed to see who can complete the task in the shortest time, or put equal numbers of conkers into several bowls to find out how many conkers can be moved per minute, for example.

CONKER SCRABBLE

Equipment:

Conkers, acrylic paint, nail polishes and permanent markers

Instructions:

Collect conkers that are about the same size and shape.

Paint a large patch on them with pale coloured acrylic paint.

After the paint has dried, write a letter on each conker with a permanent marker.

The conkers are then ready to play word games with.





Inspiration for role play games or discussions about plants and environmentalism

The DC Universe super-villain Poison Ivy made her debut in the Batman comic in 1966 and is a Gotham City botanist and biochemist. More recently, she has become an anti-hero, who uses her skills to do the right thing, but in the wrong way. She's an extreme environmentalist and her 'powers' include the use of plant-based toxins and pheromones to carry out her evil / justified schemes.

*NB Poison Ivy is named after the American or Eastern Poison ivy, (*Toxicodendron radicans*) and is not the same species as that found in the UK and Europe (*Hedera* spp). The plant poison ivy is very irritant to skin – European ivies are generally more benign.*

Poetry and songs

O roses for the flush of youth,
And laurel for the perfect prime;
But pluck an ivy branch for me
Grown old before my time.

Christina Rossetti, 1862

Ivy is often used in poetry and has many mythical properties. Explore ivy's meanings and develop your own poems, song lyrics or raps.



Ivy songs

● Ivy berries are toxic

BOOKS:

The 'Wild...' series of books by Jo Schofield and Fiona Danks
101 Things to Make and Do Outdoors
by Frances Lincoln

These books are full of ideas for outdoor and creative play with natural materials, including story sticks, story bags, storyboards.

Weaving with Ivy

Ivy is a very versatile material for weaving and braiding, plus it is usually plentiful and is easy to collect and use. Harvest long lengths and strip the leaves with a gloved hand. Use material as fresh as you can to make the weaving easier – the stems will be flexible and less likely to snap. Begin with simple braiding and move on to weaving (experienced weavers can dry their ivy for rehydrating later). Ivy braids are excellent for den building – strong, flexible *and* biodegradable!

<< examples of simple weaving frames and baskets



Ivy weaving

When you've mastered using ivy, try other long leaves or stemmed materials that might be to hand.



Ivy crowns and wreaths

There are many myths associated with ivy, but it's frequently depicted in art as a head-dress. Ivy symbolises eternal life (because it's evergreen) and fidelity (because it never lets go of what it's attached to), so it is common in bridal bouquets as well as in funeral flowers.

Ancient civilisations revered ivy, and crowns are connected to Osiris in Egypt where it represents immortality) Bacchus in Rome (called Dionysus in Greece) where it symbolises wine, agriculture, festivities and fruitfulness.

Ivy crowns are easy to weave – choose very long lengths and loosely plait them, twisting a plant tie around the ends to keep them together.



Playful springboards: LIME



Facts and Folklore

In Europe, Linden trees were associated with the goddess Freya and were dedicated to her when planting village squares. Freya was a goddess of love, so the tree is sometimes known as the tree of love. Women hoping to become pregnant would hug the tree. The romance associated with the tree is still visible today, with its heart-shaped leaves and fragrant flowers.

Facts and Folklore

The Lime tree is also known as the Linden tree. Spring/Summer: Leaves: The toothed heart shaped leaf is very distinctive of all species of Lime tree. The soil beneath a Common lime tree can receive 1kg per square metre of sugar as a result of the sticky sap (honey dew) created by its leaf Aphids. These sugars are likely to trigger nitrogen-fixing bacteria in the soils. In the UK, look out for place names with the prefix 'Lynd' or 'Lin' which indicate a link to the presence of Lime Trees from the old Wild-Woods of pre-historic times which may no longer survive there.



Facts and Folklore

Linden tree is the national symbol tree of the Czech Republic. The linden tree was chosen as the national tree of the Slavs as early as 1848, allegedly thanks to the design of the poet František Ladislav Čelakovský. It was said that a Linden tree planted next to house was considered to protect the home. All parts of the linden tree are edible, leaves, flowers, seeds, sap, and bark; the flowers can be eaten fresh or made into medicinal linden tea or tincture. The linden tree was also planted for its beauty – it is quite simply, versatile.

In the Czech Republic the linden tree (as a symbol) is found on the presidential standard, state seals, military uniforms or on banknotes.

Playful springboards: LIME

Facts and Folklore

In general, Linden trees were worshiped by old Indo-European tribes (thanks to its size and longevity) and it was planted after the birth of the first child. To this day, the linden is a symbol of protection (thanks to a typically spreading crown), help and love. Many linden trees were planted during the founding of Czechoslovakia (1918) and then again on the 50th anniversary of this event (1968). Many old linden trees are even protected by law today; there are 3,000 memorable linden trees in the Czech Republic.



Recipes: Lime flower syrup

Ingredients:
Lime flowers
Sugar
Water
Lemon juice and zest
Agave nectar

Recipes: Lime flower tea

The lime tree is famous for its flowers from which tea can be made. This tea is good for bad colds. Lime tree flowers are also a source for bees to make honey from. The lime tea has a mildly relaxing effect and can be a good tea to drink before bed.

Equipment:

Lime flowers in blossom collected on a dry day

Instructions:

Having collected the flowers, remove all the green stalks until you are left with the flowers. These should be spread out on newspaper or a sheet in a warm dry sunny spot to dry for a few days. Once dried they can be stored in tins. To make tea, apply a handful of dried flowers to the pot or cup and pour over hot water. Leave to infuse for 5 minutes and then drink.

Recipes: Lime flower syrup

Instructions

Heat the sugar and water, add agave or other natural sweeteners if you prefer. While the sugar and water is heating, clean the flowers in water. Once the simple syrup is ready, add the flowers along with some lemon juice and zest and give it a stir. Let it come to room temperature then put it in the fridge (covered) and wait a 2-4 days for the flavour of the flowers to infuse the syrup. After a few days, sieve the mixture. Storing the syrup in an air tight glass container in the fridge for up to a month. Use it to make cocktails adding to sparkling wine, or just add it to some sparkling water with a slice of lemon for a delicious spritzer. It also tastes great with fruit or yogurt.

Playful springboards: LIME



Practical Ideas: Wood

Coppice lime trees, much like hazel grow long straight poles that can be used in various projects such as creating a bow and arrow. In addition, the young suckers are very flexible and can be used in weaving, baskets and other such structures.

Practical Ideas: Bow and arrow

Equipment:

Knife, cotton, string, cardboard

Instructions:

Making the bow, find a living stem which is flexible. Cut it to the right length, shorter ones have less power. Carve notches 2cms from each end to help attach the bow string to. Attach the string, pulling it tight so the wood bends in to an arch. Make sure both ends of the string are firmly attached and will *not* move from their positions in the notches. The arrow must be thin and straight and can be dead wood; hazel is good for this purpose. Remove the bark and create the arrow end through whittling. Make quivers for the end of the arrow using cardboard and attach to the end of the arrow by cutting in a cross 2cms into the end of the arrow and sliding the cardboard in place.

Practical Ideas: Bow and arrow

Alternatively a more traditional arrow using feathers and attached with cotton can be used, trimming the feathers to size and then attaching either side of the arrow using cotton and wrapping it around.

Practical Ideas: Carving

Lime wood is the most popular timber to carve as it works extremely well with hand tools. Lime wood has a fine grain structure which provides a much smoother finish and is a light cream colour. Lime wood is extremely soft and is therefore ideal for beginner wood carvers. With some simple wood working tools you can create easy projects, such as three-dimensional carvings of a simple bird shape or a fish. You could also try to carve a simple shape into a flat surface of the wood and use a simple flower shapes or other such design.

Playful springboards: LIME



Practical Ideas: Pyrography

Sometimes known as basswood, the wood of the lime is the best wood to use for pyrography as it has very fine grains.

Pyrography is an art form, where wood is decorated, free handed, with images using a heated object such as a poker. It is best for older children as it involves using heated tools for marking designs into wood. Simple pyrography toolkits can be purchased from craft shops. The internet has wonderful ideas and inspiration for creating simple projects such as Christmas tree decorations on flat rounds of wood with a hole cut in to attach something to hang them to.

s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com



practical ideas

Art: Use the beautiful heart shaped leaves and delicate flowers as a starting point and an inspiration for an art project.

Threading Leaves:

Create a craft project by threading specially chosen, foraged leaves on to string and then hang from a linden branch outside to display. This can be an especially fun project during autumn as the colours of the leaves start to change.

Games: Heart shaped leaves & scavenging

Create a scavenger hunt, this is a list of things to collect on a walk. As the lime tree is often a street tree and planted throughout Europe, if you know you will pass by one on your walk, add heart shaped leaves to your list. Add other plants to find too and bring in textures like crunchy, velvety, and soft and spiny. You can also add in a range of colours of objects to find, feathers and so on.
Have fun hunting!

Games: Summer scents & smelly cocktails

Inspired by the beautiful smelling lime tree in summer, but can be played at any time. Give the players a container to collect wild 'finds' in; ask them to go in search of things that have a nice or interesting scent. Mash their findings in their pot using a stick and some water to create interesting scents. Once they have their finished scented cocktail, ask them to give it a name and then wow and amaze the other players with their invention and smells!

Playful springboards: NETTLE



Don't pick nettles...

...when they are in flower (they are temporarily poisonous)

...if the leaves are tinged purple (the plant is stressed and bitter tasting)

...from polluted areas (for obvious reasons!)

...without gloves!

Foraging Top Tips

Have scissors or secateurs handy. Take a basket or bag to put them in.

Collect the top, youngest leaves. Wash the leaves well in cold water. Blanch in hot water for 2 minutes to remove the stings, then squeeze the water out.

For millennia Nettles have been used to restore blood circulation under the skin, ward off arthritis in the joints and keep you warm through its irritation of the skin.

Treating nettle rash

If possible, try not to touch the area that has been stung for the first 10 minutes. It's easier to remove the nettle's chemicals if they are dry.

Use soap and water to wash away the chemicals from the surface of the skin – but sluice or dab, don't rub.

A clean cloth can be used if you aren't close to soap and water, until the area can be cleaned properly.

Once clean and dry, use sticky tape to remove any remaining nettle fibres.

If needed, a dose of antihistamine will relieve the itching. Dab on topical creams like calamine lotion or hydrocortisone to reduce redness and itching

Use age appropriate paracetamol or ibuprofen for provide pain relief.

A cold compress can provide additional relief, but avoid hot temperatures.

And don't scratch!

Celebrate *Be Nice to Nettles Week* (May is a good time – before they flower, if you wish to cook with them).



Muddy Faces

Playful springboards: NETTLE

Nettle has a wide variety of uses including as thread for textile and rope, tea, soil cleansing, hair products, dyes, manure, fly repellent, vegetable rennet, arthritis relief and food.

Nettle Soup

Ingredients:

Onion, olive oil or butter, carrot, nettles, stock, salt and pepper, crème fraiche.

Instructions:

Dice onion and saute in butter or oil. Add peeled cubed carrots, potatoes. Add chopped clove of garlic and celery. Add nettle. Add stock, salt and pepper to taste and Simmer for 10-12 mins. Serve (you can puree). Nice with crème fraiche swirled into garnish.



Stinging nettle tea

This herbal tea has so many benefits and is filled with all sorts of vitamins and minerals that support your body's natural function as well as improving your hair and skin. The best thing is...

IT'S FREE!

- 1: From the top of the plant, pick enough large stinging nettle leaves to fill a small bowl (don't be a hero, wear a glove).
- 2: Boil the water and pour it into the empty bowl.
- 3: Add the leaves to the *cooling* water and wait until it turns green.
- 4: Strain the nettle tea into a cup.
- 5: Add honey to taste 😊

Nettle Dip

Ingredients:

Nettles, olive oil, roasted garlic (2 cloves), or 1 fresh clove, or wild garlic leaves
Fresh mint leave, lemon, cayenne pepper, salt, crème fraiche or soured cream.

Instructions:

Mix together the ingredients in a blender
Taste and adjust seasoning
Serve with chopped vegetables, crisps or breadsticks



Story Starters

Read about the role of nettles in Hans Christian Anderson's tale, *The Wild Swans*, the moral of which is that courage can be painful!

In mythology, nettles are associated with the god of thunder, Thor. In some cultures, nettles would be burned in a fire during thunderstorms.

Several butterfly species lay their eggs on nettle leaves. Create a story to tell the tale of a butterfly's life cycle.

Imagine what might happen in a dream about nettles.

Making string from nettles

Find a tall straight nettle and uproot it. Wearing thick gloves, brush off the stinging hairs and leaves until you are left with a bald stem. Crush the stem between your thumb and forefinger and then run your thumb nail down the stem to open it up. Now bend the stem backwards over a finger to cause the inner fibres to break. Remove them, leaving just the outer fibres. Leave the fibres to dry a little before braiding fold a length of fibre in half and then roll the fibre separately between your fingers until you get to the end then let go. The fibres will start to break themselves. Repeat this step until you feel the piece of cord has been made. You can then use your cord to weave with and to tie things together

Meek (2015, p.12)

Making dye from Nettle

Use the above search terms to find links to guidance and refer to the websites below.

<https://rebeccadesnos.com/blogs/journal/dyeing-with-nettles> 

This website has a lot of information to help you use nettles to dye a range of different fabrics. You could experiment with different fabrics and mordants to explore the range of colours you can achieve with nettles.

<https://botanicalcolors.com/how-to-mordant/>
This website includes lots of information about mordants.



Facts and Folklore

The oak is a common symbol of strength and endurance and has been chosen as the national tree of many countries. The iconic shape of the leaves of the oak and the wonderful acorns lead to the appeal of the tree and inspire many creative endeavours!

Some oak trees can survive for a great many years, some are over 300 years old and are called Ancient trees. It is possible to identify these ancient trees by a number of characteristics, as they are far fatter than usual with a very wide trunk and they have a squat or dumpy appearance. Sometimes the tree can be quite gnarled and have some decay, the tree may be hollow inside and might look a little unhealthy but is probably doing quite well. The Woodland Trust has a useful tool to help approximate the age of an oak tree:

[Download a guide from the Pappus website](#)

Oak trees have a long-standing connection with druids: the name 'druid' means 'oak wisdom'. In the past, carrying an oak branch was believed to give you magical powers, and placing an acorn on your windowsill gave the house protection from lightning and carried on a person gave long life.

Recipes Using Oak

Warning: Inedible!

The main use of the oak trees was in pig fattening, since acorns are very nutritious for pigs. For humans, the acorn is not edible! The fruits of the acorns serve as food for many wild animals, which in return ensure the spread of the seeds. The sawdust was (and still is) used for smoking food for humans. However even though the oak is inedible, the acorn is such an inspiring symbol that it can inspire fun recipes such as these delightful sweet treats.

Recipes

Ingredients:

Soft Toffees

M&Ms or other chocolate covered nuts

Instructions:

To make these, use either chocolate covered raisins or nuts such as M and Ms. To add the topping use a soft toffee or fudge that you have bought and can be moulded and shaped into acorn caps. Add this to the tops of the M and Ms. They can also be added to the tops of cakes as decoration.



Creative arts

The wood of oak trees was mainly used for shipbuilding. Furthermore, the bark of the oak trees was often used for tanning leather.

Today, oak wood is used in hydraulic engineering, as construction timber and for masts. But also, stairs and floors are made of this wood. In the furniture industry the high-quality oak wood is employed in veneer production.

The humble acorn can be used for a wide variety of art and craft projects.

Acorn Figures

Equipment:

Acorns
Matches, toothpicks or twigs
Glue and a glue gun
Leaves and other natural materials

Instructions:

Collect some acorn and make figures from them. The only thing you need are some matches and or twigs to connect the acorns together. Use the glue gun to secure the matches. You can also add in other materials if you wanted to try to make animals or fairies.

Acorn Drawings

Equipment:

Lots of acorns

Instructions:

Split into 2-3 person groups. Each group arranges the collected acorns into the silhouette of the selected animal. People from the other groups try to recognize what the picture shows.

Variants: other themes of the picture.



Acorn Wreath

Equipment:

Card, glue, acorns

Instructions:

Create a festive wreath for the autumn by taking a wreath cut out from card and painted a dark colour. Use a glue gun to attach the acorns to the paper wreath.

Acorn Napkin Rings

Equipment:

Cardboard tube, Card, Paint, Glue, Acorns, Scissors, Glossy finishing product, Ribbons

<https://www.cindyderosier.com/2011/09/fall-napkin-rings.html>



Acorn Napkin Rings

Instructions:

Make the napkin rings by cutting a cardboard tube, such as the inside of a kitchen roll. Paint the card with autumn colours. Add oak leaf shaped designs to the painting. Cut out the oak leaves, then coat them and the acorns with a glue/gloss finishing product such as Modge Podge.

When everything is dry, use ribbon around the rings and use a glue gun to attach the leaves and the acorns.

<https://www.cindyderosier.com/2011/09/fall-napkin-rings.html>

Creative arts

Bug Village

Equipment:

Acorns, pebbles, glue and glue gun, twigs, a wooden base, stick-on eyes

Instructions:

Create a village of bugs using foraged acorns, pebbles twigs and glue gun.

Glue the twigs to the wooden base and attach the other elements carefully to you own design.



[Image source?](#)

Creative arts

Oak Leaves

Equipment

Oak leaf (or a photograph of it)
Watercolour paper
Watercolour paints in autumn colours
Brush
Paper and pen

Instructions:

On watercolour paper, use the wet-on-wet technique (using a wet paint brush on wet paper) paint yellow, brown, red stains. Allow the paint to dissolve and combine, and then dry. Once dry, draw lots of oak leaf silhouettes – why not try to make a repeating pattern that could be printed onto fabric or wallpaper?



Month of Oak

Equipment:

Oak leaves, acorns, general craft materials,

Instructions:

Choose a month of the year to become your Oak Month – during the month, everyone should have an acorn - either a real one, or a drawn one, or some other element connected with oak, e.g. coins with oak leaves etc.) with them at all times.

Work together to create an Oak Note to collate Oak information e.g. biological, cultural significance, trace oak motifs in coats of arms, logos, coins, badges, orders, buttons – anything that catches your eye. Take notes of words and drawings, including collages.

At the end of the month share the Oak Notes – everyone chooses 3-5 most interesting things and passes them on to others.

Finally: design, prepare and award Oak Medals and Badges.

Acorn Jewellery

Equipment:

Acorns, Glue, Paint, Glitter, Varnish, String/ leather to attach to the acorn, Pens

Instructions:

The acorn can be painted and decorated in a variety of ways to create necklace or bracelets that can be worn or decorations for the home.



Creative arts

Arts and Crafts: Acorn Buddies

Equipment:

Acorns, wooden kebab skewers, glue, paint, modelling clay, stick-on eyes

Instructions:

Secure the acorn to the sharp end of a wooden BBQ skewer. Use paint, modelling clay and stick on eyes to create acorn buddies. Secure your buddy upright in a lump of modelling clay.



Leaf Garlands

Instructions:

Draw the oakleaf template and cut this out from a number of different coloured card, ensure there is a space at the top that can be hole punched or cut out for the garland string to be pushed through. Add details with the pen to the leaves. String all the leaves on to the length of garland and secure in place.

Leaf Garlands

Equipment:

String or craft raffia
Scissors
Different coloured card
Pens

Playful springboards: POPPY

How are poppy seeds harvested?

After the flower petals have fallen off, the seeds dry in the poppy seed capsules and poppy fields are filled with a many-voiced, fine but clearly audible rattling sound at the slightest breeze: as if the poppy itself wanted to draw attention to its imminent harvest.

Carefully shake the seeds out by hand.

Growing poppies

The poppy is a summer plant and a wildflower, and it's easy to grow. Choose a sunny spot for poppies, and they will thrive – they can even survive three or four weeks without water.

A few weeks before sowing poppy seeds, enrich the soil with compost. The soil needs to be free draining, so dig over the area prior to sowing the seeds.

Recipes

The seeds of the poppy flower are edible and can be found in the baking or spices aisles of shops. Poppy seeds are commonly used to flavour food, providing texture and a nutty flavour. They are often seen in cakes and breadmaking.



Poppy seed recipes

Austrian poppy seed delicacies

Poppy seeds (*Mohn* in German) are a common ingredient in many Austrian dishes. Search online for recipes such as: Mohnzelten, Mohnnudeln, Mohnkuchen, Mohnstrudel, Mohn-torte, Mohn-Topfen-Kuchen and Mohn-Muffins.

Use a translation app and start cooking!

Practical uses

Poppy flowers have been used as painkillers for soothing mild aches and pains like toothache and a sore throat.

A tea infusion made from the dried petals helps ease sore a throat or cough.

Fresh poppy petals have been used in preparing a syrup for use in red dyes, lipstick, to make the colour of the wine more vivid, and for reducing facial wrinkles.

Scientists are now beginning to think that chemicals within the petals may prevent skin cancer.



Facts and Folklore

Austria's Poppy Village

In the Waldviertel, a region in Lower Austria, poppies are cultivated and presented in all their facets including a poppy nature trail, which in addition to cultivation, harvesting and use also conveys historical facts and the poppy garden, in which a wide variety of poppy varieties bloom. Beyond the village and into the fields is a poppy hiking trail - follow the red poppy symbol!



Waldviertel



Mohndorf Austria

If you want to use parts or all of the poppy gently remove the whole flower from the stem using secateurs or scissors, then carefully pull off the petals, sepals or seed head.



Poppy percussion

The poppy seed head is the fruit of the poppy. Allow the seed heads to dry out for 1-2 weeks, then shake each one in turn.

The sound is the seeds rattling inside. Compare the sounds from each dried poppy head, and use them to create percussion music.



Hungarian Poppies

In Hungary there are great poppy-fields all over the country and it grows near the houses as well in suburban gardens. However, though it looks beautiful, farmers consider it to be a weed among the grains.

The poppy is commonly depicted in Hungarian folk art.

Playful springboards: POPPY

Remembrance



Dried poppy petals can be used to decorate the tops of cakes or added to art and craft projects such as candles, soaps and bath bombs.

Poppies provide great inspiration for photography, poetry and drawing projects - be adventurous and have some fun thinking up ways to create inspired by poppies.

The poppy is an international symbol of remembrance of the human loss on the battlefields of WW1 in Northern Europe. The battle-scarred land provided perfect conditions for the awakening of the poppy seeds, which thrive on disturbed ground. Poppies in full bloom then conjured an impression of an overwhelming 'sea of blood' evoking sorrow as well as hope.

With the theme of remembrance and with its beauty, the poppy is an ideal plant to inspire creativity and art projects in young people.



Hapa Zome

is the art of creating prints using the natural dyes released when a plant is 'bashed'.

Plants with a high-water content and strong colours work best, as they will leach into the medium being used. Stems and petals work equally well. Each young person finds their own leaves and/or petals and is provided with a piece of cotton approx. size 20cm x 10cm (cut from old pale coloured sheets for example).

Trap the plant parts on one side of the piece of folded cloth, fold the other half over on top of the leaves/petals.

Pound the cloth with a mallet or piece of wood.

Gently lift to examine the print being made.

When the fabric is finally unfolded, a virtually symmetrical imprint of the plant part is left

behind on both halves of the folded cloth.

Arts and Crafts

Create a poppy remembrance lantern by making poppies and gluing them to the outside of a jam jar illuminated with a tealight candle.

Make poppies from a multitude of media such as felt, tissue paper, card, paper, coffee filter papers or even from painted, cut up egg boxes.

Collect several small leaves (which usually fall from the stem) and dry them between books or in a flower press for a couple of weeks. Use the dried leaves to create a flower or abstract pattern for pictures, greetings cards and gift labels.

Playful springboards: WILLOW

Facts and Folklore

The use of willow bark dates back thousands of years, to the time of Hippocrates (400 BC) when patients were advised to chew on the bark to reduce fever and inflammation. The pain-relieving property in the willow bark is called salicin, a chemical that is similar to aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid). In the 1800s, salicin was used to develop aspirin.

It was told that it was bad luck to tell a secret while standing under a willow, as the wind that blows through the leaves will reveal the secret to everyone. Throughout the ages, people have been entranced by the willow tree and they appear in the ancient legends, tales, folklore and customs of different cultures.

They feature in three of William Shakespeare's plays:

Hamlet, Othello and Twelfth Night.

The willow tree is flexible and resilient and has healing properties.

When willow trees are cut back to ground level they will very quickly grow back numerous new rods – this is known as coppicing and is a traditional way to provide a ready source of timber.

Willow bark contains natural plant growth hormones which can be used for rooting new cuttings. Gardeners, who are taking cuttings from to try and propagate them can make willow water to help their cuttings to take root.

To do this collect young first year willow twigs, removing all foliage and chopping up and boiling them in a pan. Once cooled overnight, this water can be sieved and put in a secure container in a cool place (make sure to label it!).

It can then be used to soak cuttings from plants before planting them on and the propagated plants can be watered with the willow water.

Living fences: As the willow is such a resilient plant, it can also be used to make fences that will take root and grow, with new growth being woven back in to strengthen the 'living' fence.

Practical uses

Willow is a commonly used material in art and craft projects; its flexible twigs make it perfect for creating weaved object such as baskets, containers and fence panels. The wood of willow trees is often used in sculpture and if 'live' twigs are used (in other words, green cuttings), the sculptures can grow and come alive!

For inspirational ideas, search online for 'willow sculptures' or visit www.annaandthewillow.co.uk



Carolyn Bell, Source: [facebook.com/annaandthewillow](https://www.facebook.com/annaandthewillow)

WREATH

Willow bound or woven together makes an ideal base for a decorative wreath. Scavenge for seasonal natural objects (it doesn't have to just be at Christmas!) and weave them into the base. Similarly, willow can be used to 'weave' a bird's nest structure that can be lined with moss and used to display interesting natural objects.

Working with Willow

WHAT KIND OF WILLOW?

Willow for projects can be cheaply purchased, but why not go out and forage for your own willow twigs? They are very easy to identify - use the *Pappus* Willow ID sheets to help.

There are many varieties of willow and some snap more easily than others. If you plan to make 'living' willow sculptures, soak the twigs (called 'withies') overnight in a bath beforehand to ensure they are suitably flexible.

Willow can then be used to create simple structures and shapes – see the next pages for project ideas.

Plait willow by securing one end of the withes with string or masking tape and twisting the pieces of willow together. Secure the other end and allow the plait to dry out.



WILLOW SPHERE

A willow sphere can be the launch point for many creative ideas.

First make a circle of willow by weaving two pieces of willow together and taping or folding the ends inside. Make two or three more circles of similar dimensions and slot them inside one other to create the sphere shape. Secure the circles with wire or twine.

You can also add strength to any structure by weaving willow in and out of whatever basic shape you have, for example a pair of fairy wings or a fish shape.

Search online for 'willow weaving' or 'willow projects'



Playful springboards: WILLOW

MASKS

Equipment:

Elastic, willow withies, masking tape, paint and other decoration, tissue paper, PVA glue

Instructions:

Sketch out mask ideas – you might like to give children a theme to work with. Using withies and masking tape, create a frame for the mask and be wild with your ideas – willow can be used to create long necks, large heads, big ears or any other exaggerated feature. Cover the structure with tissue paper and glue, adding colour and eyes, hair etc where needed.

Masks are great fun and allow children to invent new characters, or to adopt characters with strong cultural and historical links. The role of the mask is to transform the wearer – creating an opportunity to connect with the natural world and step out of our human constraints – a springboard to drama and role play. Masks can be very simple but working with willow gives to opportunity to create more sophisticated three-dimensional structures.

Natural materials mobile

Collect interesting natural objects from your area. Make a willow frame for your mobile – perhaps a cross shape or a hoop. Using twine or string, attach the natural objects to the frame, allowing each to hang a different level so that all can be seen.

Adding paper to a willow frame

Add a decorative layer to a simple mobile structure or to the lanterns (see left). To do this, spread a watered-down mixture of PVA glue on to a flat surface that has been protected with a piece of plastic. Carefully lay the tissue paper on to the glue mixture. Take care, as if the tissue gets too wet it will tear. Take a sponge soaked in the glue mixture and wipe it over the tissue then fold the tissue in half and wipe again. Lay this tissue on your shape or lantern, overlapping the willow structure. Continue doing this, adding layers of tissue until the whole shape is covered – but – don't add too much or you'll lose the effect of light coming through.

At this stage, add paint, glitter, eyes or Anything else to decorate.
Leave to dry.

Creative Ideas

LANTERNS

The method for creating a lantern is similar to the technique described above but the structure needs to be three dimensional. A straight sided shape is often easiest, e.g. a square or triangle. Be sure to add a source of light to the bottom face of the lantern by adding a small jar with a battery-operated tealight – wire it to the base of the lantern so that it doesn't move. Once the light in is in, add the tissue paper to the lantern. Allow it to dry and then attach wire to the top and perhaps a stick to hold the lantern. Finally cut a small hole in the base of the lantern, under the battery operated tealight, to access the on / off switch. Many lanterns look very effective in a massed lantern parade.



Creative Ideas



ROUNDERS BAT

This is a slightly larger whittling project and requires larger, sharper tools so adult supervision is required. Take a thick willow branch, approximately 20-25cms long. A rounders bat is thicker at the 'playing' end than the 'holding' end, so decide which end the handle will be fashioned from. Remove the bark and use the tools to carefully cut and carve the willow into a long, smooth bat shape. Use rough sandpaper to tidy its surface. Add twine or tape around the handle to make it more comfortable to play games with.

CHOOSING RHYME

In Slovakia, children use a common 'choosing rhyme' to decide who will be "it" while playing tag. Vřba means WILLOW in Slovakian.

Choosing Rhyme:

1. Stojí vřba pri potoku
Na nej visí zvon
Na koho to slovo padne
Ten musí ísť von

2. Pri potoku vřba stala,
do vody sa pozerala.
Pod vřbou sa koza pásala,
zavše sa jej brada triasla.
A tá koza zvonček mala,
zrazu na ňom zacengala
cingi – lingi – bom!
A ty pôjdeš von!

Translation to English

There is a willow by the stream
A bell hangs on it
To whom will the word fall
has to go out

There is a willow tree by the stream,
that looked into the water.
The goat grazed under the willow,
its chin shook.
And the goat had a bell,
all of a sudden he started on it:
cingi - lingi - bom!
and out go you



Playful springboards: WILLOW

FICTIONAL WILLOW

One of the most famous willows is a star of Harry Potter books – the Whomping Willow, a species of willow that has magical properties and grows in the grounds of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Find out more about the Whomping Willow by searching for it online – there is much ‘mythology’ available for it, to inspire children’s own play or stories



Games



WHOMPING WILLOW GAME

This is a version of the ‘rock, paper, scissors’ game.

To be a Willow: quickly raise your arms up above your head and stand tall.

To be a Student: crouch down as if to run or roll away.

To be a Wizard: lunge forward as if pointing a wand.

Students beat Professors as they can roll away from their magic spells.

Professors beat the Willow as their magic is more powerful.

Willow beats the Students as it can attack and fling them away through the air.

Players face each other and on the count of three adopt their pose simultaneously.

The winner gains a point.

If they adopt the same then neither wins a point.

WILLOW BASES

Many children’s games use ‘bases’ – capture the flag, tag etc.

Big willow hoops make great portable bases.

As an example, try Tag In The Hoop: in a large area, place lots of willow hoops, which are safe bases for a game of tag. 3 or 4 players who are ‘it’ have to try to tag the remaining players, who cannot be caught if they are inside one of the willow safe bases. However, willow bases are only safe for up to 10 counts – then the player has to leave. Once they are caught, they can either sit out or join the catchers.

Remove safe bases as the game progresses to make it harder.



Playful springboards: ANY PLANT

Icebreakers and Warm Ups

These activities can be adapted to use plants or plant-based items and can help to stimulate conversations about plants.

LEAVES IN THE WIND

Aim:

Warming up / listening and observing
Learning / reinforcing leaf vocabulary

The game:

Every player should collect four different leaves each. They then stand in a large circle with space to run about in. One person stands in the middle and is the 'caller'. The caller chooses one of their leaves, holds it up, and makes a descriptive statement about it e.g. leaves that are pinnate, leaves with opposite veins, with multiple leaf-lets.

Each person for whom the statement is true runs across the circle to another place.

The last person to find a space becomes the new caller.



NAME 6

Aim:

Self disclosure

The game:

Chose an object that is made from a plant. The object is passed around the circle until the person who is 'it' with their eyes closed says stop. The person holding the object then has to answer the following:

Places you have seen, jobs you have had, things you are good at, things you like/dislike, plant at that you like. Edit the questions according to the group and the desired aim. Once this is done, this person is then 'it' and the game continues.

The above game is from Brandes (1990).

SPIN THE BOTTLE

Aims:

Self-disclosure, trust development, vocalising needs, sharing.

The game:

Players sit in a circle- they spin the bottle in the middle, whoever it points to, they have to answer the question 'what are my personal needs from this group?'

Variations: Any questions can be prepared by an adult leading the session or it can be played more informally with truth or dares set down by the group.

Can be used as an icebreaker or to develop confidence in a group.

Playful springboards: ANY PLANT

SILENT WALK

Outdoors – If you have even the smallest green area take a regular ‘quiet walk’ there, in all weathers, in silence all the way there and back. The children will learn to do this with practice. This could be an activity that is carried out immediately after morning break perhaps, (while children still have their coats on), or after lunch break, (and registration can take place outside too). If there is time, try the ‘sitting contemplation’ exercise below as well.

Indoors - If you have no green area, or the weather is very bad, then bring the green in and have a quiet focussed circle time examining green foliage. (see section on indoor plants too)



MINDFULNESS

There is value in just ‘looking and being’ in the natural world, for a few moments, everyday if possible. There is overwhelming evidence of the importance of immersion in nature, or even just looking at plants, to the mental health and well-being of us all. The natural world can help to calm children, be life enhancing and restorative, and lead to greater attainment in the long term. Access to the earth is important too, as there is much evidence now that children’s immune systems are compromised if they do not access the beneficial microbes in soil. Some of the activities below focus on mindfulness, but many others in these toolkits are just about engaging with nature whilst learning and playing.

Taking learning time outside, in and with nature, builds over the weeks to have significant beneficial effects for the mental health and wellbeing of children and adults. This is even more important for children living in urban areas and in social deprivation.

FEELY BOXES

Aims:

The fun of this game is reaching inside a box or bag without knowing what you might be about to touch.

The game:

Place a diverse range of natural objects into a dark bag or box – choose items that look and feel different, have textures, shapes and weights that vary. The players sit in a circle. Pass the bag around the group and the players take turns to explore the contents with their fingertips, describing the items’ qualities – e.g. it is soft, squishy, slimy, rough, spiky and trying to guess what it is. Use blindfolds if you have them or players can just close their eyes.

RISKY GAMES

The aphorism ‘to grasp the nettle’ means to force yourself to be brave or do something likely to be unpleasant. Here are a few group games that promote the idea of emotional and physical risk taking.

Playful springboards: ANY PLANT



ICE PENDANTS

You need a selection of shallow plates, string, natural materials and a very cold night. Place a piece of string on the plate, with the string hanging over the side where it will form a hanger for the pendant. Collect a range of attractive leaves and lay them on the plate. Carefully pour water onto the plate and leave outside overnight to freeze. In the morning remove the ice from the plate and hang in a tree to enjoy your decorative ice bauble.

NATURAL JEWELLERY

You will need a collection of found objects such as pinecones, acorns, feathers, conkers shells. You will also need thread which you can buy or try making yourself, see nettle springboard for ideas on making natural twine. Use a bradawl or drill to make holes in your natural objects and thread them on to your piece of jewellery.

NATURAL ART

Be inspired natural objects you find around The activity location. Collect as many as you can Then make 'frames' on the ground made of sticks and Create your picture within the frame using your found objects. Look online for examples of natural and ephemeral art by artists such as Andy Goldsworthy and James Brunt.

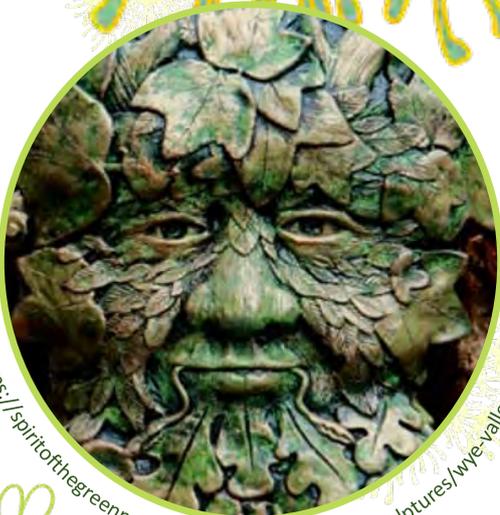
IMAGINING MONSTERS

Using stories as a springboard, take some time outside to create your own monsters using leaves, plants and other things such as twigs, stones and moss that can be found locally. Digging up or buying some clay can be a good addition to this activity as clay can stick to trees or create a base for objects. This can also work in introducing the idea of the 'Green Man', protector of the forest using clay and leaves to create the face of the green man.

Creative ideas

CAMOUFLAGE

Try using leaves and branches for camouflage. This can be ideal for decorating a den to make it less obvious in a space. It is also possible to make oneself less obvious and blend in by using the natural environment to hide in. This can be especially helpful for the popular game of "Capture the base". Two teams in an agreed area of woodland, both agree where their base will be and they leave one person to guard. The rest of team try to stealthily capture the other teams base. This is similar to 'Capture the flag' where each team hides a flag or a jumper. The teams have to capture the other team's flag but if they get caught by the opposing team they have to undertake an agreed forfeit. Similar games such as hide and seek can be played using camouflage to make it more difficult.



<https://spiritofthegreenman.co.uk/shop/green-men-sculptures/>

www.wye-valley-green-man-sculpture/

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