



Empowering Communities through Play

Play For Free



Wild Flower Seed Bombs

Wild flowers provide crucial habitat for pollinators and other beneficial insects and wildlife. Seed bombs are great fun to make with children and can help restore lost wildflower habitat and brighten up urban spaces.

You will need:

Flower seeds - collect ripe seeds on a dry day as soon as seed head ripens. Lay somewhere warm to dry then extract seeds and store in labelled paper envelopes. You can also buy a range of wild flower seed mixtures in garden centres or online.

Peat-free compost

Water

Powdered clay (from an art suppliers) or use clay rich soil

A mixing bowl or an old washing up bowl

Wooden spoon or hands!

A tray

What to do:

Mix together: 1 cup of seeds + 5 cups of compost + 2 cups powdered clay (or clay soil).

Gradually add water to bind everything together and roll mixture into balls about the size of a walnut.

Place them on a tray and leave to dry somewhere warm like a sunny window sill.

Plant your seed bombs in the spring or autumn by throwing them into bare parts of the garden or outdoor space!



Making Compost

Composting garden and kitchen waste reduces landfill and makes rich organic fertiliser that plants thrive in. Its great fun and children learn about the value of worms and insects to our ecosystem as they discover how they turn plant waste into soil and why these creatures are known as nature's recyclers!

Getting started

Build a simple heap and cover it with some old carpet, use an old bin or build your own from wooden pallets. Position your heap in a shady spot and loosen the soil underneath to encourage earth worms and other insects which help break down organic material.

What to put on your heap

Grass cuttings, leaves, flowers, soft pruning's, fruit & vegetable scraps, tea bags, egg shells, spent coffee grounds.

Cardboard & paper; egg boxes, plain paper, envelopes, brown paper, cardboard tubes, corrugated cardboard.

Straw and pet droppings from a herbivore (e.g. rabbit, hamster, horse).

What to avoid

Cooked food, meat, fish, glossy paper, perennial weeds, woody stems, diseased plants, dog poo.

Tips: Have a balance of carbon and nitrogen materials i.e. mix carbon rich materials like paper, cardboard, dried leaves with nitrogen rich

Materials such as vegetable scraps, grass cuttings. Cover the heap with old carpet or tarpaulin and turn once a month with a garden fork.

Keep things damp but not water logged. Chopping or shredding items up smaller speeds up the process and when ready compost should be dark, crumbly and sweet smelling. It can take 6 months - 2 years depending on the size and temperature of the heap.

Bird Kebabs

It's really easy to attract birds to your garden – you just need to put out food for them. Before long you'll have them flocking for their lunch. Watching the birds can be great fun and connects us with nature. Here's a great way to use up stale or out of date foods. Children really enjoy helping to prepare the ingredients and threading is great for developing hand eye coordination!

You will need:

- Stale bread
- Cheese
- Bruised apples or pears
- Raisins
- Thin garden wire
- Pliers
- String
- Cookie cutters

What to do:

Cut cheese and apples into cubes and place into small bowls. Encourage children to cut shapes from bread using cookie cutters. Use pliers to cut lengths of wire about 20cm long. Thread items on to the wire and twist into a circle. Tie on some string and hang in the garden - position in a relatively open area away from predators, where the birds will feel safer.



Pine Cone Bird Feeder

Fat balls and seeds provide a high energy diet in the cold winter months when natural food is in short supply. Feeding during the winter months has proved to be crucial for the survival of some species. The best way to attract birds is to put food out for them and you'll have plenty of interesting activity to watch.

You will need:

Pine or fir cones

String

Scissors

Lard

Wild bird seed

Mixing bowl

What to do:

Tie length of string to top of pine cone.

Cut lard into small pieces and place in mixing bowl.

Add some bird seed and mix together with your fingers until ingredients bind together.

Use your fingers to push the mixture into the pine cone until covered.

Put them in the fridge to set before hanging up in your garden for a high energy bird treat!



Mud Play



Mud swamp

Collect up your favourite plastic animals and find a muddy puddle for them to play in. Hippos, elephants and pigs especially like wallowing in the mud. Add twigs, ferns and big leaves to create a 'Jurassic world' for your favourite dinosaurs.

Mud pit

Mould some polythene or a tarpaulin over a tyre to create a well inside. Tuck the loose ends underneath and add soil, water and mix to desired consistency. Now choose your toys and props to create your very own mini world.

Diggers, trucks and pebbles make a fun building site or remove your shoes and go mud paddling!

Mud foot prints

On hot days it can be very cooling to let your feet have a mud bath. Make muddy footprints then watch them dry and crack in the sun.

Mud bricks

Mix soil, sand and water to a stiff consistency, an old washing up bowl is ideal for mixing. Press mud into a mould; an old margarine tub or similar works well. Carefully turn out the mud brick and lay somewhere warm and sheltered to dry out. A great activity for a baking hot day!

Mud slide

Find a good location for your mud slide; a grassy slope works well. Check the area for any sharp stones and remove them.

Position a polythene sheet or tarpaulin facing down the slope. Add a good splash of your watery mud mix and you're ready to get sliding!

More Mud Play

Tree trolls

Press a dollop of the mixture on to a tree trunk and make a face, decorate it with leaves, flowers, twigs, stones etc.

Mud painting

Mix soil and water together to the consistency of paint. Recycled food containers make great mixing pots and use sticks for stirring. Look for natural materials to use as paint brushes e.g. bird feather, seed head, twigs. Paint onto strong paper or yourself!

Mud modelling

In a large bowl mix some mud to a stiff consistency with a little water. Use the mixture like you would clay to make models. You can use your hands or a mould to make shapes e.g. an ice cream container, or yoghurt pot.

Earth concoctions

Build a play kitchen outdoors for making concoctions. No need to be complicated or expensive, an old piece of furniture is a good base or you can create something from pallets, or planks of wood supported by tyres or crates. Provide old pots, pans, baking trays, food tins, and kitchen utensils and position near a water source to help play flow for longer. Extend play by introducing props and other resources e.g. a herb planter or vegetable bed, paint play food onto pebbles, add seating, shelves, a chalk board for a café or shop role play scenario.

Potions

Provide jam jars or empty food tins and sticks for mixing. Collect leaves, fruits and petals that you like the smell of. Add water and mash ingredients together. Why not make up a name for your potion and share around for others to smell.

Bow & Arrow

Great for practicing your target aim or to fuel the imagination for pretend play in a wooded space.

You will need:

A bendy stick (willow, hazel or sycamore works well)

A craft knife

String

Scissors

Small squares of felt or other fabric

What to do:

Cut the stick to a length that's suitable for your height.

Make a notch about 2cm from each end of the stick using a craft knife.

Tie some string around one notch and pull it to tension the bow. Tie the loose end around the other notch and secure with a knot. When you pull the string back you should feel tension in the bow. Now find some thin straight sticks for the arrows. Wrap some felt around one end (the tip) and secure with string. Now your ready, away you go!

A note of caution—the arrow could potentially hurt someone at close range, so please be careful!



Leaf Crowns & Jewellery

Celebrate the glorious colours of Autumn by using fallen leaves, twigs and seeds to make crowns, hats, masks and bracelets.

You will need:

Strips of card to make head band approx. 5cm x 50cm (card from a cereal box works well)

Double sided tape

A stapler

Scissors



What to do:

Prepare a head band for each child by attaching a length of double sided tape to one side of the strip.

Ask the children to collect a variety of natural materials e.g. leaves, twigs, seeds, pine cones, pine needles, feathers.

Place them in the centre for everyone to share.

Peel protective strip from double sided tape and ask the children to stick the materials on. Fit to child's head size and secure with stapler.

Variations

Make a simple mask template from card, glue on natural materials and attach elastic for an nature inspired mask.

Cut shorter strips of card for wrist bands and bracelets.

Tree Dressing

Tree dressing is based on many old customs from around the world and at different times of the year. In the UK Tree Dressing Day falls on the first weekend of December and has grown to become much more than an expression of a love for trees. It's a chance for the whole community to gather and celebrate the leafy friends we all have in common.

What to do

Choose a tree, or group of trees that are important to your school or community. Remember to take photos of your tree and the decorations you make, removing them after your celebration to avoid any harm to wildlife.



Here are some ideas to get you started:

- ◇ Make paper leaf shapes, then decorate them and write messages or poems on them.
- ◇ Cut lengths of colourful ribbons and tie them to the branches.
- ◇ Cut out paper triangles and attach to string .Children could draw pictures to tell a story showing the wildlife that lives in the tree.
- ◇ Make ice decorations, partly fill balloons with water, cut lengths of string. Place one end inside the balloon leaving the rest outside. Peg the top of the balloon and hang outside to freeze. Fill shallow food trays with water, add leaves/berries and a length of string. Carefully remove ice bauble or decoration from balloon or tray and hang on the branches of your special tree.
- ◇ Leaf garlands, thread leaves together as you would make a daisy chain.
- ◇ Leaf bunting, use a large needle and wool to sew coloured leaves together in a long chain.

Wind Play

This fascinating invisible life force is so much fun to play with. Listen to the wind in the trees, watch the leaves swirl around, feel its sensation against the skin or its strength as it tugs away on your kite!

Here are some ideas to get you started

Lie down and watch the clouds fly quickly across the sky.

Throw leaves into the wind see how far they fly.

Chase bubbles as they dart about in the wind.

Turn your jacket over your head and catch the wind, try leaning into the wind.

Tie string to the handle of a bag for a simple kite.

Make wind twirlers—cut streamers from crepe paper or strips from a plastic bag and tape them to a stick.

Make flags—cut triangles from tissue paper or fabric and attach to a stick or bamboo cane.

Throw objects at a target, see what happens in the wind?

Tie rope to corners of tarpaulin to make a sail or giant kite.

Hang wind chimes in a tree.

Play with wind toys—kites, wind socks, and wind mills.



Science Play

Make a Sundial

A sundial is a device that uses the position of the sun to reflect the time. An upright stick, called a gnomon, is positioned to cast a shadow onto a pre-marked sundial face. As the sun moves across the sky, the shadow also moves. The concept can be easily demonstrated in with a very basic sundial built with a stick and some pebbles.

What to do:

Find a sunny open place to plant the stick in the ground. Choose a straight stick about 2 feet in length.

Use one of the pebbles to mark the place where its shadow falls on the ground.

Return to the stick every hour and mark where the shadow falls with another pebble.

Repeat this process every hour throughout the day. Optional—use a watch and write the time on each pebble with chalk.

Make a rain gauge

Cut the top section off a plastic bottle it should look a bit like a funnel. Put some pebbles in the bottom for weight. Use a ruler and

permanent marker to measure and mark increments for measuring the rain fall. Start about 3cm from the bottom and mark this point with a zero. Continue marking at 1cm increments all the way up the bottle. Fill the bottle with water to the zero mark. Invert the top of the bottle into the rain gauge—this will funnel the rain down into the bottle. Place outdoors on a flat surface and when it rains observe and record the rain that falls.



Science Play



Make a weather vane

This tool tells you from which direction the wind is blowing. Wind direction can indicate changing patterns in the weather i.e. Wind from the south means it's likely to get warmer. Wind from the east means rain or snow is coming and from the west means the weather may clear.

You will need:

An old CD, permanent marker, a dowel or bamboo stick about 60cm long, a straw, a large pin, scissors, card.

What to do:

Mark the cardinal points on the CD, if you like you can add half way points i.e. NE, SE, SW, NW. Find a suitable sheltered spot outdoors, place the CD on the ground, push the bamboo stick through the centre hole and firmly into the ground. Use a compass to find the direction of North and align the CD with it.

To make an arrow, cut a small triangle and a square from the cardboard. Cut a slit in each end of the straw and push the triangle on one end and the square on the other. When finished it should look like an arrow. If needed use a bit of glue to secure the arrow parts in place. Find the centre of the straw, push the pin through the straw and into the top of the bamboo cane. The straw needs to spin freely in order for your wind vane to work. If the straw won't spin properly remove the pin and reposition it or trim the arrow tip and tail slightly to reduce the weight. Now watch for your wind vane to start spinning.

It will point in the direction the wind is coming from.

Outdoor Games

Scavenger Hunts

Exciting and fun, often played in teams, players are sent off to "scavenge" for the items on their lists within a set time (optional). Remind children not to collect berries or fungi and to wash hands afterwards.

Some ideas to get started.

Spring; find a bright green leaf, cherry blossom, moss, egg shell, catkin, flower.

Summer; find a flower, ladybird, dandelion clock, four leaf clover, feather.

Autumn; find a conker, acorn, 3 different coloured leaves, stick, conker case, helicopter seed.

Winter; find a cob web, icicle, snowflake, pine cone, leaf skeleton ever green leaf.

Sensory; find something smooth, rough, prickly, soft, scented, shiny, squishy, bumpy, wet, dry.

Colour; find items that match the colours on a list e.g. green, brown, grey, white, red, yellow.

Virtual/imaginary; locate a sycamore tree, fence, gate, rabbit hole, fairy house, elf's table, hobbit's hole, troll's house.

Miniature; each child is given a small container– i.e. empty match box or plastic egg and asked to collect as many small objects as possible in their container. Tip contents out on to paper and count, child with most items wins.

Odd one out; each child/team collects six items in an egg box - five items should have something in common which they decide upon first. The other teams/children have to guess which item is the odd one out.



Outdoor Games



40/40 Save all

Using a tree as the home-base, one child is 'it' and counts to 40 while the other kids run and hide. As soon as the person who is 'it' spots someone in their hiding place, he runs back to the tree, shouts out their name and where they were hiding (that person is now 'out'). The only way the hider can save themselves is by getting to the tree first and shouting '40-40 save all' - then everyone is safe and the original person remains 'it'. If all the hidiers are found then the first person to be out is the next person to be 'it' and the game starts over.

Kick the can

A fast-paced, team run-around game of attack-and-conquer strategy. One person (or a team if group is large) is designated to be 'it' and an empty can is placed in the open playing field. With eyes closed, 'it' counts to an agreed number, and the other players run and hide. 'It' then tries to find and tag each of the players, whilst keeping a watchful eye on the can. Any player who is tagged is sent to the "jail" somewhere in sight of the can. The rest of the free players attempt to kick the can before being tagged out. If they can kick the can without being caught, they set all the captured players free.

Capture the flag

Two teams each have a flag and the objective is to capture the other team's flag, located at the team's "base", and bring it safely back to their own base. Enemy players can be "tagged" by players in their home territory and, depending on the rules, they may be out of the game, become members of the opposite team, sent back to their own territory, or frozen in place ("in jail") until freed by a member of their own team.

Outdoor Games

Meet a tree

Partner children up, one person in each pair is blindfolded. The non-blindfolded person acts as a guide and leads their partner to a tree. Blindfolded person tries to find out the details of the tree through touch alone. Once familiar with the tree they are led back to the starting point. Remove blindfolds and they now have to locate their tree, once correctly found partners swap and the game starts over.

Camouflage games

These are great games to play at dusk. How well can you blend and disappear into the natural background? Children could wear dark or muted colours and disguise faces with mud or face paints. Have a game of hide and seek. Move slowly and quietly as not to attract attention. Keep low down in the shadows and use tree trunks, bushes and other natural features to hide behind.



Make a camouflage cape or net

Gather some garden netting or empty vegetable or log nets. Collect natural materials such as bracken, leaves, twigs, grasses. You can weave them through the netting or use string or wool to attach items to the net.

Rope trail

Wind a long rope on a route through the trees and bushes at about a child's waist height. Use a variety of obstacles—different terrain, shaded and open, have the trail go up and down. When it starts to go dark encourage children to each take a turn to hold onto the rope and follow the course. Have an adult stand at each end of the trail. The game can also be played blindfolded during the day.

Games for the Dark



These exciting games can be played in a safe open space away from traffic and other hazards. Ensure everyone knows the boundaries before play begins. Define the playing area with glow in the dark markers or light reflective tape.

Fire fly

The Fire fly hides with a small pocket torch. After 20 seconds players look for the fire fly who is moving around quietly. Every 60 seconds the fire fly must flick their torch on and off. When caught the catcher becomes the new fire fly.

Glow stick manhunt

Make a trail of glow sticks leading into the trees and bushes. Carefully place them so that the next stick can be seen glowing every metre or so ahead. The trail leads to a person who is hiding from the group, when the group reach the end of the trail the hider leaps out.

Glowing treasure hunt

Hide activated glow sticks outside and let the children find them. Once collected you could award points or prizes for certain colours.

Zombie glow stick tag

You'll need twice as many red and green glow stick bracelets for the number of players. Give the green bracelets to the healthy humans. One person is the zombie and wears all the red bracelets. The zombie counts to 40 while the healthy humans hide. The zombie goes on the hunt to infect the healthy humans. When caught by the zombie they become 'infected' and are given a red bracelet to wear, they also become a zombie. The red glowing zombies keep chasing healthy humans until they are all caught and infected. The first person to be caught is the zombie for the next round.

Bannock Bread/ Campfire Twists

For the dough mix together:

300g/ or 2cups of strong bread flour

1tbsp. baking powder

½ tsp salt

2tbsp olive oil.

Approx. 75ml of water

Mix until a soft dough forms, add more water if required. Knead dough until smooth.

Twists

Find a green stick (approx. 2cm in diameter, willow is very good).

Peel the bark to the bare wood.

Take a small ball of dough and roll into a long sausage shape 1cm thick and twist it onto the stick.

Cook over hot embers rather than flames, which can blacken your twist and make it taste unpleasant.

Optional – brush with melted butter and sprinkle with cinnamon sugar

Flat bread

Take a small ball of dough, flatten it in the palm of your hand and cook on a grill or skillet over the fire.

After a minute or so turn bread over and cook until golden brown.



Campfire Recipes



Orange peel muffins

You will need:

Oranges, a small knife, wooden spoon, mixing bowl, muffin/cake mix, aluminium foil, small spoons, gloves, tongs.
Cut top from oranges and scoop out segments, reserve the hollow shells. Prepare muffin/cake mix according to the package directions and half fill orange peel shells with cake mixture (chocolate works well). Replace the lid and wrap each one with two layers of aluminium foil twisting the ends to form an easy handle for gripping from the top. Place upright on hot coals and cook for 15-20min or until cooked (cooking time will vary depending on size of fire). Use gloves and tongs to remove muffins from fire. Remove foil and cool before eating the muffin from the centre of the orange with a spoon.

Baked apples

For each serving you will need:

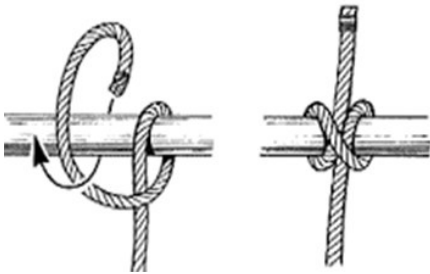
1 apple, 2 tbsp. dried fruit, 2 tbsp. nuts (optional), ½ tsp cinnamon sugar (made from 60g sugar: 1 tsp cinnamon), ½ tsp butter.
Core apples, leaving the bottom intact and stuff the cavity with fruit and nuts of your choice. Sprinkle with cinnamon sugar and dot with butter. Wrap the apple in a double thickness of foil, twisting the ends to form an easy handle for gripping from the top. Place the apple upright on the coals. Bake for 10-15 minutes, turning occasionally until the apple is cooked. Use gloves and tongs to remove apples from fire. Before serving, open the foil and let the apple cool for a few minutes.

Handy Knots

Two useful knots for tree swings

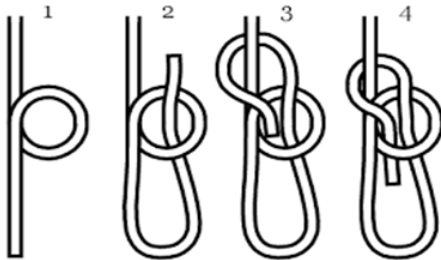
Clove Hitch

A constricting knot which can be used to tie rope to a length of wood to make a seat for swing. Also handy for tying a bundle of bamboo canes together.

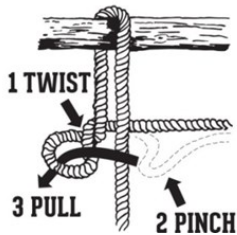


Bowline

The bowline is an ancient and simple knot used to form a fixed loop at the end of a rope. It's easy to untie after being subjected to a load. For a tree swing, throw the loop end over limb of tree. Thread loose end of rope through the loop and pull down to secure. It can also be used to attach a tyre to end of rope.



Handy Knots



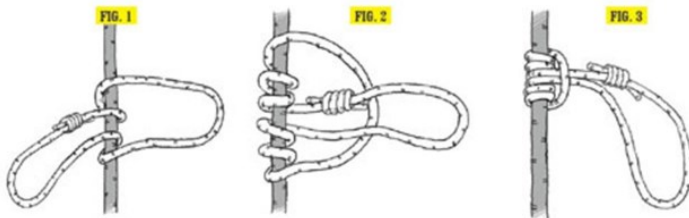
Siberian Hitch or Evenk Hitch

A quick release knot, great for tying a tensioned ridge line between two supports i.e. for a tarp shelter.



Prusik Knot

Use to secure a loop to a ridge line e.g. for tarp set up. It slides when not weighted but jams solidly upon friction.



The Hammock Knot

Prevents frictional wear to hammock handle. Strong and easy to tie simply pull loose ends to release.





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