

Discover Me

Natural Play ideas for children and families





These pages introduce natural play activities and ideas which are aimed at maximising children's and young people's contact with nature. They provide a range of sensory strategies in the form of play, to help children and young people with a range of needs to engage with nature in both indoor and outdoor settings.

The activities have been developed thanks to the feedback obtained from families of children around Scotland and the staff from the healthcare and family support sectors who have participated in TCV Scotland's Discover Me programme.

Whether you are a parent, teacher, youth worker, staff member or volunteer, you may use these ideas as a starting point to create your own ones. Most of the activities can be adapted to different ages and abilities. Through these, we aim to give you some ideas and the confidence to provide outdoor play experiences to children and young people.

Don't be afraid to make up your own games
- creativity doesn't have limits!

Why play?

According to Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, all children have the right to play. Through our Discover Me programme, we have offered children and young people with a range of abilities and needs the opportunity to make this right a reality.

Play is the work of children. While playing, children learn, develop new skills, increase their interaction with peers and others and most of all they have fun!



Adapted from: A practical guide to Activities for Young Children, 3rd Edition. Christine Hobart and Jill Frankel

Through natural play activities, parents, carers and other relevant adults have the opportunity to directly help children's development and provide a good experience for them. And natural play can enhance family relationships while they spend more time together.

"I sometimes compare play to oxygen - it's all around us, yet goes mostly unnoticed or unappreciated until it is missing"

Stuart Brown, founder of the National Institute of Play (USA).



General benefits which can be applied to the majority of the natural activities in this pack:

When children take part in natural play activities they are able to develop motor-skills, flexibility, co-ordination and balance. When hearing how a game, craft or activity is carried out children are learning to be patient and listen.

When they are playing with siblings and friends they are able to learn the invaluable lesson of co-operation and turn-taking and this goes right alongside interaction skills.

Through observation, children are able to copy movements and actions of the activity that the play leader is facilitating and they can develop a sense of achievement when they have completed their task. Children are also able to observe their surroundings and engage with sensory experiences that they might have not had before.

Children's imagination and memory skills are also nurtured when they are allowed to experiment within their natural play activities and this in turn allows them to think freely for themselves.

Through active play, children also develop their hand-eye co-ordination. All of these skills and developments are extremely beneficial for children and young people in the short and long term.

How to use this play pack

Most of the activities here can be done with materials that you are likely to find at home and in most outdoor green spaces.

Have a look at the activities and choose the ones that you think your children will enjoy and better suits your group's needs. Offer children a range of materials to use and let them choose how and what they want to play.

Children and young people with special needs, on the whole, enjoy the same kind of activities as their non-disabled friends. In many cases the role of the adults is going to be much more one-to-one but that doesn't mean that they can't participate.

Quick tips!

- Make sure you offer children a range of choice with the aim of making as much as possible available to everyone. They should be **free to choose** the activities they want to engage with.
- Depending on the children, they might not all be able to take part in all activities - it is important to be **flexible and creative**.
- The adult role is to be the **facilitator and enabler**. It is important to offer children support but we also need to know when to take a step back and let them try by themselves, explore and discover.
- Many children rely on our **facial expression** to know if it is "okay" to do something or if it is "scary". Our **voice tone** is also important as this will give them some guidance on how to react to certain experiences. Make sure your body language and voice shows them that it is OK to engage in the activity you are offering.
- Try to use as many open ended materials as possible. **Open ended materials** are the ones that can be many things to many people; objects that do not have a specific function (eg clay, paint, twigs). By doing this you will ensure that play is not limited or controlled by the object and you'll enhance their creativity.
- You can set up areas which **highlight different sensory experiences**; allow children to have access by themselves (eg painting area, messy play, smells and textures, etc.).
- Encourage children to use their imaginations and let them **take control, modify and change the environment!**



List of activities

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Christmas ideas

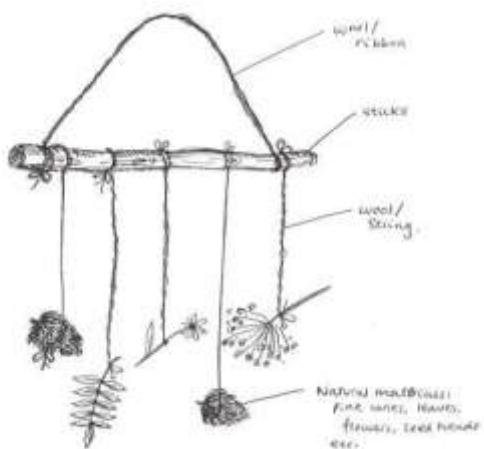
- Activity 21: Reindeers
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Activity 1: Feed the birds!

Invite local birds right into your garden with this simple activity that children and young people of any age will enjoy!

What do you need?

- Peanut butter or lard
- Cardboard tube or a pinecone
- Mixed bird seed or breakfast cereal
- Spoon
- String



Cover your cardboard tube or pinecone with the peanut butter or lard using a spoon.



Tip: Children can use their hands instead of the spoon for a sensory experience.

Roll it in the bird seed or breakfast cereal.

If you are using a pinecone, tie a string around it. If you are using a cardboard tube, pierce two holes in the cardboard tube, thread the string through it and tie the ends together allowing enough space to be able to hang it from a tree.

Observe the birds that feed from your bird feeder, they really do eat them!

Why?

- Feeding the birds gives children an awareness of their surroundings and allows them to explore.
- They also gain sensory experience through touch and smell



Precautions: Be aware that some children might be allergic to peanut butter and/or birdseeds. You can choose lard and breakfast cereal to carry out this activity instead.

Activity 2: Bug hunt

What do you need?

- Bug pots (or a plastic jar)
- Magnifying glass
- White tray (or other type of container)

Choose a local park or green space where you'd like to do your search (it could be in your own garden!). Give children a couple of bug pots and a magnifier.



Where can you look?

Have a look at the base of trees, bushes and around flowers.

Turn over medium sized rocks as bugs usually hide under them! Don't forget to put the rocks back to the way you found them.

When you find a bug, use a spoon or your fingers to pick it up and place it in the bug pot. Be gentle, you don't want to squeeze it!

Once you have a few bugs, place some dirt in the white tray and empty your pot there. You can use the magnifying glass to examine all the beasties.

If you have finished examining your beasties, you can set them free where you found them.



Tips:

- You can ask the following questions while a child is engaging with the species: *How many legs do they have? Which one is the fastest? What do you think they eat?*
- Many children enjoy touching the bugs and feeling them on their arms and hands; it's a great sensory experience!

Why?

- Children will have fun whilst experimenting with science and being able to practice identifying different bugs which they find along the way.

Activity 3: Flags

What do you need?

- Calico fabric, an old bed sheet or crepe paper for wind streamer
- Pebbles
- Natural materials (leaves, petals, grass, etc.)
- Child-friendly paint and paint brushes, crayons
- A long twig



Leaf Bashing

Gather a few leaves, petals and grass from a nearby green space. Place your natural objects on a firm flat surface and cover with a piece of white cotton sheet or calico fabric. Find a small stone or piece of wood and tap repeatedly until the colour of your natural objects start to come through the material.

You can continue tapping as long as the children want. Why don't you try to make different patterns? Can you cover the whole area?



Precautions: Never leave children alone when gathering natural objects as there might be hazardous plants in the area. Encourage them to wash their hands after the activity.

Flag painting



You can use child-friendly paint and crayons if you are having the session indoors.

Why?

- Here, children will be learning the names of colours, shapes and textures as they see them emerge on their sheet. This activity also allows children to be creative and gives them freedom of artistic expression.

Activity 4: Spin a smell

What do you need?

- Spinner
- Cards-photos
- Jars with natural materials, eg
 - Sweet: Vanilla/Lavender
 - Fresh: Mint (fresh mint and peppermint oil)
 - Yuck: Comfrey leaves (picked the day before and chopped-up is best)
 - Wow: Ginger/Juniper berries
 - Mouldy: Soil/Rotting log.

This game uses 5 jars each labeled with a different adjective, you can use 'Sweet', 'Fresh', 'Yuck', 'Wow' and 'Mouldy'. Use dark jars or paint them so that what is inside cannot be seen and place a different natural smelly material in each of the jars.

Make a spinner with each of the smells on it from cardboard, a straw and a butterfly pin (see photo).

Create a card for each one of the natural materials.

Each player spins the spinner and then has to smell the jar which it lands on, eg 'Sweet'. The player then has to try and guess what they are smelling using the picture cards. The jar can then be passed around the rest of the group for everyone to have a guess.



Try to stimulate conversation about which smells are familiar/unfamiliar. Ask children about their favourite smells/ smells they don't like.



Tip: You can use natural smelly materials from the garden and link the activity with a bug hunt.

Why?

- Trying something new keeps children engaged and wanting to learn more. Here children are stimulated by the smell sensations and are able to build upon the knowledge that they already have.

Activity 5: Tree cookies

What do you need?

- Wood discs
- String, wool or ribbon
- Child-friendly paint and paint brushes, crayons



You can purchase tree cookies online or the country rangers from your area might be able to get you some.

Encourage children to draw their favourite species, a creepy crawlly that they've seen during a bug hunt or anything from nature that they like (a leaf, an acorn...). Children can feel the natural material and use paint, pencils or crayons to draw.

Once they've finished their drawing, help them put the string through the hole and tie it.

Encourage them to hang it where they think is the best place for it! They might want to use it as a necklace instead.



Why?

- Children will have the opportunity to experience new textures as well as using their imagination in their artistic expression.



Tip: Link this activity with a mini beast hunt and encourage your child to draw the most surprising thing they found.

Activity 6: Feely box

What do you need?

- Selection of natural objects for inside the box, such as feathers, conkers, fresh leaves, dry leaves, berries, lichens, sycamore seeds, etc. You can add non-natural objects which are familiar to children or objects that you would like to link with other activity (eg a glove and trowel if you do a gardening activity after).
- Cardboard box
- Fabric. In the example we used the sleeve of an old jumper for people to reach into.

What to do

Make a hole in the front of a cardboard box, put fabric on the inside and decorate.

Use a selection of natural materials with different textures inside the box.

Ask children to reach inside the box and pick up an item, they then have to feel the item and guess what it is. Alternatively, the participants could be encouraged to describe the feeling of the item they have picked to the other participants for them to guess.



Why?

- Children are able to explore and discover new colours shapes and textures during this game as well as confidence building in being able to identify what it is they are feeling.

Activity 7: Land art

What do you need?

- Sticks, stones, cones, leaves and other natural materials to create works of art on the ground.

Go on a nature walk around an outdoor area such as a local park. Encourage children and young people to collect a wide range of natural objects that you find lying on the ground along the way. These can include: leaves, fruits, twigs, petals from flowers, seeds, seed cases, etc.

What to do: Use your found materials to make land pictures and sculptures. Maybe you could create a picture of a bird you've seen in the area, or what about a stunning tree or a creepy crawly?

Encourage children to pay attention to the different colours, shapes and textures. Try not to use any manmade materials in the pictures! You can take photographs of them before leaving so that children remember their creations.



Why?

- During this task participants will be able to build on their knowledge and appreciation for nature and how it should be treated carefully and with respect.
- Children will have the opportunity to experience textures, shapes and colours from nature, as well as using their imagination in their artistic expression.

Activity 8: Artist's palette

What do you need?

- Pen and paper
- Card
- Scissors
- Double-sided sticky tape

Draw the outline of a leaf, or any other suitable shape from nature, on plain paper. This will form the artist's palette.



Copy as many of the shapes as you need onto card and cut them out.

Attach a number of strips of double-sided sticky tape along the length of each shape, leaving the protective plastic on until you are outdoors with your group.

Give each child an artist's palette. Ask the children to collect as many colours and textures as they can and stick them onto the palette.

Once all are happy with their results, encourage children to talk about what they found and why they picked some of their natural materials (eg Where did you find that? What caught your attention? Is it smooth? Do you know what tree this leaf is from?).



Why?

- The development of hand-eye co-ordination when carrying out this task will really help children learn through exploring, and also by watching others.

Activity 9: Nature collage

What do you need?

- Lining paper
- Child-friendly paint (different colours) or berries, earth, leaves and other natural materials to create your own natural paint!
- You can either use paint brushes or create your own with twigs and leaves.
- Natural materials to make shapes
- Paint container or tray for the paint

This is a simple but engaging activity that will get children exploring around their environment. Encourage children to gather natural materials and create a picture using them. They can stick on leaves, lichens, twigs etc. You can also create your own paint together by mixing natural materials and water!

Hang their drawing in a place where they can see it. It will make them remember their nature experience.



Why?

- Children will be able to explore their feelings and express them freely throughout this craft. It will allow their creative thinking to shine through their work.

Activity 10: Green Man faces

What do you need?

- Air drying clay
- Natural objects from the area you are in (eg leaves, twigs)

There are lots of myths and legends about woodland gods, fairies, elves and spirits. The Green Man is one of the most famous – a mythical figure often portrayed as a mask made entirely from leaves.

Go on a nature walk. As you walk along, look for spooky faces peering out from the trees. A tree might have only one eye showing as it mischievously winks at you, it may have both eyes open wide, or you may only spot the nose and mouth of a sleeping tree. You may be able to tell how the tree is feeling - the signs are there!

Why don't you...?

- ✓ Make a clay-mask in the shape of a face, mould it onto a tree trunk and decorate it with leaves and seeds
- ✓ Create a giant face peering up from the woodland floor!
- ✓ Twist twigs and grass to make dolls
- ✓ Try and make a life-size figure!

When you've finished, leave them hidden around the woods for other people to discover.



Why?

- When taking part in this activity children will learn adaptability skills. They will learn how to manipulate nature whilst also being kind and respectful of it at the same time.
- Children will develop fine motor skills, creativity and imagination.

Activity 11: Let's get muddy!

Safety reasons are sometimes one of the key barriers that prevents parents or carers of children with additional support needs from accessing the outdoors and using natural resources. As long as we take into account allergies, children and young people's needs, and carry out the appropriate risk assessment, activities outside can really benefit children with special needs as they will take part in a great number of **sensory experiences**.



What do I need?

- Some soil
- Paint pots
- Water
- Food colouring
- Card or paper for painting on

Mix soil, water and a range of other natural materials. You can put some of the soil into paint pots to make mixing easier.

Take out any stones or lumps if you want to have smooth paint and slowly add water and stir until creamy.

You can also add some drops of food colouring to your mud if you want children to experiment with colours. Encourage them to paint with their hands!

Why don't you make "mud bugs"?



Why?

- Here children will be able to explore new capabilities as they transform, create, test, explore, decorate and embellish things which they find in nature. They will be using their own imaginations and creating transformations in nature.

Activity 12: Trails

What do I need?

- Natural objects
- A puppet or an object with which children are familiarised
- Warm clothes and waterproofs

For this activity you can split the group into two teams. If you don't have enough people, you can work as a group and ask a person to participate in the final part (eg another member of staff, a mum, one sibling, etc.).

Tell children that you are going to play a game in which the aim is to hide the puppet (or other object) in the woods and the other team/person will have to find it. To make it easier for the other team/person, you will create a trail together using natural materials. You can make arrows with twigs on the ground, feel the mosses and lichens and create marks/arrows on trees, etc. Try to be as creative as possible!

When children are happy with their trail and their puppet/object is well hidden, tell them to ask the other team to try to find their puppet.

This activity is very exciting for children as they have the opportunity to explore the outdoors in detail, give ideas for the trail and make their own clues.



Why?

- For this task children will be able to become one with nature and not only discover but also explore the nature that surrounds them.
- Children will also enhance their descriptive skills and increase vocabulary.

Activity 13: Musical instruments

What do I need?

- String
- Natural objects to hang from trees and hit against each other
- Old pans, bowls or other objects that can be used for drumming

This activity can be run in and outside, although it works better outdoors as children have the opportunity to explore and gather their own materials.

Show children a range of natural objects (or ask them to collect them if you are outdoors) that could be used to make noises (give them some examples).

Gather all the objects and think together about the best ways to use them to create musical instruments (should we hang things from the trees so that wind will move them? Can we make a drum, or what about a maraca?)



Tip: Create other noise makers with different size logs, pans, metallic bowls, and wooden spoons. Let the children be creative!



Why?

- During this game children will be able to develop a sense of rhythm whilst trying out their musical abilities. They will experience trial and error whilst also being respectful of the environment.

Activity 14: Colours!

You can create a wide range of nature activities about colours and we encourage you to use them throughout the seasons so that children appreciate the changes outdoors. These are some examples of things you can do:

Colourful pine cones:

What do I need?

- Pine cones
- Child-friendly paint
- A box with between 4 and 8 compartments
- Felt of a range of colours

If you are outdoors, go for a walk with children and ask them to collect a great number of pine cones. To make it more interesting, ask them to choose only the ones they like because of a reason (eg someone might want to collect smooth ones, someone might want to collect big ones, etc).

Once they've finished, gather all the pine cones together and encourage children to paint them with different colours (eg blue, yellow, red, green, brown and white). To have the same number of each colour, ask them to paint 6 in blue, 6 in yellow, etc.

You can create a box similar to the one in the photo using cardboard. Put a piece of felt in each of the compartments. The colours must match the ones of the pinecones.

Once the materials are ready, ask children to put the pinecones in the different compartments considering the colours.



Can you find all these colours during a walk?



Tip: Once the box is made, you can use it in different seasons and ask them to gather natural objects that match the colours of the box. You can change the colours to make things easier (eg use yellow, orange, red and brown in autumn).

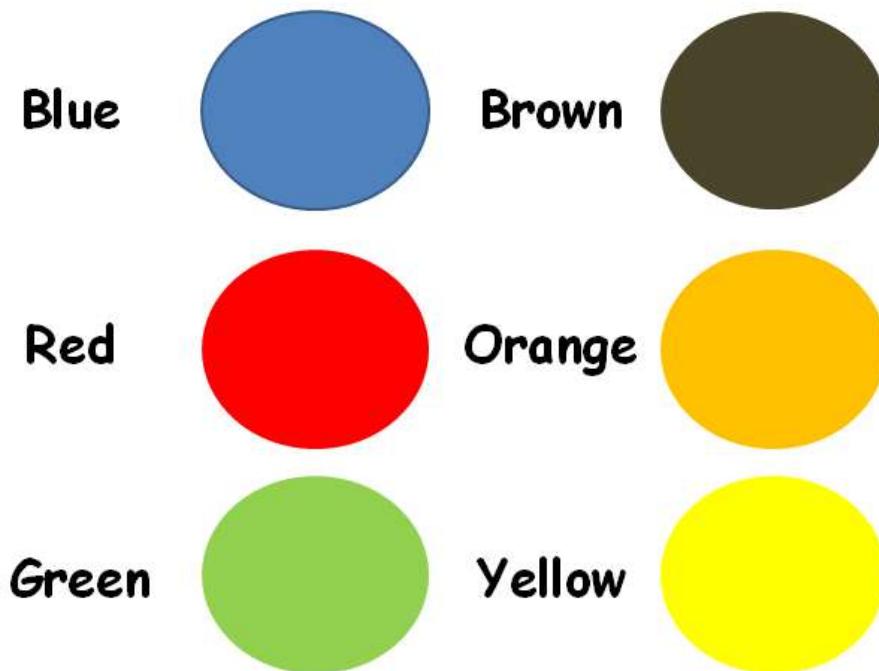
Nature Hunt:

What do I need?

- Sheet of paper with colours
- Colour paper
- Double-sided sticky tape

Children love nature hunts! You can create your own one depending on the season.

You can make the activity more interesting by adding double-sided sticky tape to a piece of colour paper, peel it off and ask children to gather objects of a range of colours (as in the example below).



Once you've finished, encourage them to talk about the things that they found.

Why?

- Taking part in this activity will allow children to develop their independence as they explore their surroundings. Also, they will be engaging with the environment as they gather and discover all of the colours.

Activity 15: Journey stick

People from many countries use journey sticks to tell the story of their journey to others. Why don't you create your own journey stick while exploring the outdoors?

What do I need?

- String from different colours and textures (as many as you want!).
- Long stick
- Natural objects (eg feathers, leaves, fruits, lichens, mosses, etc.)

Go to a local park or greenspace with children. Ask them to have a look around the park and find a long stick. Once they all have one, show them all the strings and encourage them to pick the ones they like the best (because of their colours or their textures). Cut short and long pieces of the range of strings chosen and help the children tie them up to the stick. Now is time for the journey!

Take a walk and encourage children to tie different natural objects to the stick (eg feathers, leaves, fruits, etc.). Depending on participants, they might need more direction (eg let's all find a long feather, let's all find a smooth leave, let's all find something green, etc.).

Once they are all happy with the objects gathered, sit down together and talk about what you found.

Children can keep their journey sticks and show them to their family and peers. They'll be proud of something they've made that reminds them of their journey to the park!



Why?

- Children will be able to fine tune their motor skills by exploring their local area. They will also enjoy a sensory experience during this activity as they select and use natural resources which have varying shapes and textures.

Activity 16: Twig frames

What do I need?

- String from different colours and textures (as many as you want!).
- Sticks

Ask children to find four thick sticks (or more if you want to have compartments as the one in the photo below).

Use the strings they choose to tie the sticks together.



A twig frame can be done at the beginning of one session or a project and be used by children to frame artwork that they have created on the ground or use it to frame the things they like the most about an outdoor area.

Why don't you encourage children to use it in a number of sessions and gather the photos taken in a book? This way they'll remember what they saw at the end of the project.

Why?

- Children will continue to refine their exploring abilities as they hunt and gather sticks for this fun activity! They will also be able to show off their artistic flare as they decorate their stick frames ready for photographs to be put in.

Activity 17: Foot prints

What do I need?

- Air drying clay or make your own play dough for a more sensory experience (see recipe in Christmas decorations section)
- Pencils and paint brushes
- Child-friendly paint
- Photographs of Scottish mammals and their tracks (if you want to make the activity more educational)
- Paper



Part 1:

Select a number of photos from Scottish mammals (eg otter, red deer, rabbit, red squirrel, etc.). Cover them with 6 squares of paper as in the photo below.



Ask children to take off one square and try to guess the animal. Then a second one and ask if they know that animal (you can give them clues). Repeat until the children guess the correct species and talk a little bit about it.



Tip: If you don't know much about Scottish mammals, don't panic! Have a look at this website which will give plenty of good facts:

<http://www.snh.gov.uk/about-scotlands-nature/species/mammals/land-mammals/>

Part 2:

Give each child a piece of clay. Ask them to use their hands to squash it until it has the shape of a disc.

With a pencil or the back part of a paint brush they can draw the footprint of any of the animals seen on Part 1 of this activity. See photos below:



Children can paint them with their fingers or paint brushes. Remember, they don't have to be perfect, messy is always fun!

**Why?**

- Children will be able to let their creativity run free in this activity! They will be able to practice their concentration and listening skills.
- Using clay is an excellent messy activity that will allow children to develop motor skills and explore new textures.

Activity 18: Animal pots

What do I need?

- Yogurt pot or plastic cup
- Cardboard
- Pencils, crayons or paint
- Scissors
- Double-sided sticky tape or child-friendly glue.
- Felt if you want to offer different textures
- Wiggly eyes



Encourage children to think about their favourite animal or any species that they like. Talk a little bit about them (what does it eat? Where does it live? Does it make anything?).

Ask children to draw the shape of the animal on the cardboard, paint it and cut it.

Let them choose felt colours to cover the cup. Use the sticky tape or glue to stick the felt to the cup and do the same to stick the cup to the animal shape.



Why?

- Being able to show through the medium of arts and crafts which bugs and beasties they have discovered whilst playing and having fun is a great way for children to show off their creativity during this task. They are exposed to new materials, textures and colours and will learn about scissor safety as well.



Tip: Why don't you gather some natural materials they can use to decorate? (eg leaves, twigs, lichens, etc). Remember to let the children choose! They don't have to make an animal they know, they can create a whole new species.

Activity 19: Make cool bugs

What do I need?

- Grab a few pebbles and some paint
- Collect some leaves and twigs if you need them
- Child-friendly glue
- Paper

Start the activity showing children photos of a range of species and talk about them (How many legs do they have? Do they fly? Where do they live?).



Ask children to paint their pebbles to look like mini beasts or design their own bugs; have a look at the ones in the photos.

You could stick pebbles together to make a loooooong insect or use leaves and twigs to make features like wings and legs!



Why?

- Here children can let their imagination free as they design their very own bug! They will be able to create a whole new species all to themselves and really experience a true sense of achievement.

Activity 20: Bubble pipes

What do I need?



- Plastic yoghurt pot or similar
- Scissors
- Plastic drinking straw
- Towelling material (eg J-cloth or old towel)
- Elastic band
- Bubble solution
- Shallow bowl

What to do

- Using the scissors, make a small hole in the side of the pot and insert the straw.
- Cut a square of towelling material large enough to cover the top of the pot.
- Stretch towelling over pot and secure fairly tightly with elastic band.
- Mix up bubble solution and place in a bowl.
- Dip the pot into the bowl until the towel soaks up the solution.
- Now blow through the straw, and a column of foam will form rising up above the pot.

Bubble recipe

Mix together:

2 tbsp of concentrating washing liquid
1 tbsp of glycerine (sold in chemists in larger quantities/or supermarkets)
½ litre of water

Why?

- During this activity children will be able to make a product and play with the bubbles. Children will manipulate materials, follow a recipe, enjoy the mixing and develop fine motor skills.

Christmas ideas

Activity 21: Reindeers

What do I need?

- Coloured paper and pen
- Pipe cleaners and pom poms
- Double-sided sticky tape
- Scissors
- Wiggly eyes
- Child friendly paint
- Leaves
- String/wool



Ask children to choose one piece of paper and help them draw the shape of their hand on it. Help them cut it.

Add double sided sticky tape until the “paper hand” is covered. If you are outdoors, encourage children to gather a range of leaves. If not, collect them prior to the session.

Help children stick leaves on the “paper hand” as in the photos below. Once they are happy with their result, it’s time to make the face of our reindeer!



Help children add the wiggly eye and a pom pom chosen by them. Also, let them choose a colour for the antlers, make them and stick them on the back part with tape.

Don’t forget to make a hole on the reindeer for the string! Children can hang it up from the Christmas tree or in any other place they choose.

Why?

- Children will be choosing and selecting resources, experimenting with different textures and developing personal artwork.



Tip: Make it more sensory by putting some paint on a tray. Ask children to put their hand on it and on a piece of paper after. This will be the reindeer’s body!



Activity 22: Clay decorations

What do I need?

- Air drying clay
- Leaves or other natural objects
- String
- Paint and glitter



Give each child a piece of clay that they can hold with one hand. Encourage them to tell you how it feels in their hands and to squash it until it has a flat rounded shape.

Let them choose the leaf they like the most for their activity and ask them to place it on the clay. They can either stick it there (as in the last photo) or draw the shape of it with a pencil.

Once they have the shape, give them a range of colours they can use to paint their decoration. Don't forget to make a hole for the string and hang it when it dries!



Tip: You can make your own play dough at home and involve children in the process. It's a fun, messy activity that everybody loves!

Play dough recipe



Why?

- Children will be using different textures (natural materials and clay).
- This activity will develop their creativity and enhance their fine motor skills.

Activity 23: Glitter pine cones

What do I need?

- Pine cones
- Glitter
- PVA glue
- Brushes
- Ribbon/wool/pipe cleaners for hanging up

Attach a pipe cleaner/ribbon/wool to the top of the pine cone to hang it up.

Help children to cover the pine cone with glue and shake on glitter. Glitter paint works better for some children, or mix paint and glue and then apply glitter for a coloured pine cone.

Hang up in the Christmas tree, in a place that the children choose or they can give them as gifts.



Why?

- Children will create their personal piece of artwork using natural resources and experimenting with different textures.

Activity 24: Candles

What do I need?

- Beeswax sheets
- Wick
- Clay

Introduce the activity talking about honey bees' lives. Eg did you know that there are more than 30,000 bees in a healthy beehive? Are they all the same? You can talk about the Queen, the drones (males) and the workers (females).

Honeybees produce honey but they also make other resources, such as wax.

Take one of the beeswax sheets, and ask (or help) children to touch and smell them.

How to make the candle:

Warm it up with your hands so it is easy to bend.

Place the wick in one edge and press so that it gets stuck into the wax.

Help the children roll the sheet to create the shape of the candle.



Tip: For a better sensory experience, use clay to make the stand for the candle.



Why?

- Motor skills development: squeezing, treading, flattening
- Great sensory experience: messy and tactile exploration
- Creativity: sculpting, modelling, painting and using natural resources

Activity 25: Flags with a Christmas theme

This activity is similar to 'Activity 3: flags, flag painting' and the resources needed are the same.

It is a good arts & crafts activity to incorporate in a session for children to choose among a range of other things. For instance, why don't you set up a session in which you give children the following options?

- Reindeers
- Clay decorations
- Glittery pine cones
- Candle making
- Flags with a Christmas theme

Children can choose to make any or all of the above!



Why?

- Here children will be learning the names of colours, shapes and texture as they see them emerge on the sheet. This activity also allows children to be creative and gives them freedom of artistic expression.

Activity 26: Sensory Christmas tree

What do I need?

- Lining paper and pen
- Double-sided sticky tape
- Scissors
- Leaves and other natural objects

Draw the shape of a Christmas tree on a big piece of lining paper as in the picture below and add double-sided sticky tape inside the drawing.

Ask children to gather a range of leaves with different colours and textures. Once they have a great amount, encourage them to stick them on the tree.

You can also add pom poms and/or other decorations so that there are more textures for them to feel.



Why?

- Children will have the opportunity to choose natural resources and enjoy sticking them while creating a simple Christmas tree.
- They will also experiment with a range of textures and colours.

Activity 27: Christmas cards

What do I need?

- Thin colored paper
- Wax crayons (chunky ones are better)
- Coloured card
- Glue sticks
- Scissors
- Pencils/ paint
- Glitter/glitter paint
- A selection of leaves



Give each child a piece of coloured paper and let them choose a leaf and coloured crayon. Place the leaf under the paper and help the participant colour over the top to create a rubbing. When the participant is finished, cut out the leaf rubbing and stick it onto some folded card to create a card.

Encourage children to decorate with glitter/pens/pencils/paint. Let them choose!



Why?

- Through this activity children will develop observational skills, and fine motor skills while using natural resources to create nice personal cards.



References:

- www.snh.gov.uk
- <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/>
- Hobart, C. and Frankel, J. (2005). A Practical Guide to Activities for Young Children, 3rd Edition.
- Brown, S. (2010). Play: How it Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul.

Useful publications

- **Outdoor Play in the Early Years**
By Helen Bilton
- **The Stick book**
By Jo Schofield and Fiona Danks
- **The Wild Weather Book**
By Fiona Danks and Jo Schofield
- **Supporting Child-Initiated Learning: Like bees, Not butterflies**
By Sally Featherstone
- **Activities, Games and Challenges for Learning Outside the Classroom**
By Tracey Maciver

Useful websites

- <http://www.tcv.org.uk/helpingkidsgrow/>
- <http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/naturedetectives/>
- <http://creativestarlearning.co.uk>
- <http://theimaginationtree.com/>
- <https://www.forestfoundation.org/family-activities-in-nature>



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