

Investigating... autumn

Exciting and educational ways to explore the great outdoors from the Woodland Trust's Nature Detectives...

Autumn is one of the most beautiful seasons and a real period of change in the natural world. It is also a particularly exciting time for children, as distinctive sounds and smells fill the air, and the once vibrant green shades of summer give way to warm yellows, reds and browns. Fruits and nuts are also harvested, days become shorter, and animals prepare themselves for the cold winter months ahead. Changes like these are ideal for inspiring

children's interest in the outdoors. This is the time of year that they can hunt for conkers, play in fallen leaves, learn all about the autumn harvest and freely explore the outdoors in cool but not cold temperatures.

To help you get the most from the season, here are some great ideas from the Nature Detectives autumn area, which has over 150 autumn downloads as well as a special 'autumn play booklet', downloadable at www.naturedetectives.org.uk/autumn



Woodland Paints

For artistic afternoons, children can create beautiful pieces using fantastic autumnal paints from the woodland or garden floor. To begin, source large pieces of paper or an old sheet and a variety of different outdoor materials: for green-coloured paints you could use holly, lichen and moss; rosehips make a strong red paint; and squashed hedgerow berries like elder, blackthorn and blackberries make great blue and purple natural inks.

When it comes to getting arty, encourage the children to squash the berries themselves, mash bark and grass and crush leaves to create their paints, inks and dyes. Giving children a hands-on experience with these materials will add sensory elements to the activity, bringing the great outdoors to an indoor environment. Don't forget that some berries can be poisonous, so don't touch anything you're unsure of, and make sure that you and the children wash your hands afterwards.

Resources: tinyurl.com/TNwoodpaint

Leaf Crowns

You can get creative using leaves you have collected from home or found with the children in the nursery garden. To make the leaf crowns an outdoor activity, prepare plenty of paper hats indoors and take the children outside to decorate them with fallen treasures. Cut out enough strips of card for each child and make sure they are long enough to go around the children's heads. Add a strip of double-sided tape and then staple or tape the card to the right size for each child.

Let the children wear them and take them on a walk or out to play - they can decorate their regal headwear by adding leaves to the double-sided sticky tape as they go. There are also leaf ID sheets online for identifying which leaves come from what type of tree afterwards.

Resources: tinyurl.com/TNplaypacks



Seed Planting

The Nature Detectives seed planting kit contains everything you need to grow trees from autumn seeds with your class. Seed planting involves a few different steps. You can start by hunting for seeds outside with the children and identifying them using the handy fruits and seeds ID sheet. Once you've collected all the seeds you need in your seed collecting bag, choose to plant a few outside or let the children plant their own seed indoors using empty yoghurt pots and seed labels, and by following the seed planting tips available online.

Once seeds are planted you should keep an eye on the newly planted seeds, and record the changes as they grow on the printable chart. You may not see immediate changes, but comparing the growth of different seed-types will demonstrate how each species is different. As the seedlings grow, excitement in the classroom will build and the pots will provide a great talking point - discussing what's happening with the children and asking them what they think the seeds might look like one day is a great way to capture their imaginations!

Resources: tinyurl.com/TNseeds



find out more

Nature Detectives offers over a thousand downloadable resources for children, early years practitioners and teachers, all available for free, providing hours of fun that incorporates nature, learning and creativity. Head to www.naturedetectives.org.uk/teachnursery and start your autumn fun now.