

SPRING

has *sprung!*



Step outside and discover a season of rebirth and renewal, says national charity Learning through Landscapes...

From the discovery of fledgling life to the first sight of new flowers, spring can offer a wonderful learning experience. Outdoors is the place to explore changes in nature, experience seasonal weather and to celebrate myriad springtime events. Try the following suggestions to maximise its potential and give your children the best experience of the new season.



But before you go out...

How accessible are your outdoor resources? Storage is very important, so think about easy access for that spontaneous opportunity to study wildlife or paint a rainbow. If you have an outdoor storage area ensure all the equipment is readily available to the children. Label drawers and boxes with pictures and store in low cupboards or trolleys so everyone can locate and use them, giving children the opportunity to make choices and decisions about how and what they play

Tip: Set reminders for practitioners to check the condition of equipment and outdoor clothing at specific times throughout the year. Try sharing the job of checking certain items with particular members in your team. This way you'll know about a hole in a Wellie before someone gets a wet foot!

Harvesting and growing

You can grow in springtime regardless of the outdoor space you have available. Even the smallest garden can accommodate growing containers made from tyres, sinks, grow bags, window boxes and hanging baskets. Use your growing project as an opportunity to recycle dustbins and old sand and water play trays (remember to drill holes in the bottom and fill with a layer of gravel to allow for drainage). The children can get involved in

preparing the soil, sorting and filling pots, planting seeds, watering and weeding, feeding and monitoring for pests. Towards the end of spring you can begin planting carrots, beetroot, lettuces, onions, radishes, rocket, peas, spinach, turnips and much more.

Tip: Plant herbs like mint and lemon balm in plant pots, buckets or hanging baskets to provide sensory and textural experiences. These herbs can also encourage role-play by providing materials for making potions or perfumes.

Nature trail

In spring lots of animals and insects will be returning to your garden from hibernation. Try spotting spider webs on dewy mornings or investigate a place where creepy crawlies may be hiding. It's also a great season for a bug hunt as insects are more active and will be searching for early sources of nectar from early flowering plants. If you haven't already made a mini-beast hotel, they can be made simply by piling logs and stones in the corner of your outdoor space.

If you'd like to attract seed-eating birds, ask the children to make feeders and keep them well-stocked. Try different types of feeder or seed and find out which they like best. You'll also see lots of activity from birds as they begin nesting and searching for food for their fledglings. Talk to the children about life cycles and explore the journey from cocoon to butterfly, or spawn to frog. If you're lucky enough to have a pond, allow them to observe the cycle in real life. Try letting the children create a springtime scrapbook to record their findings.

Weather activities

If you're lucky enough to see rain and sun simultaneously, use the opportunity to try and spot a rainbow. Alternatively, you can always create your own using a prism or by spraying water on a sunny day. Look at the green shoots and new buds, and discuss how the sun helps these changes to occur. Collect items that the wind has blown down and explore them further through conversation and observational drawings. Try watching cloud formations by using a laminated cloud guide to spot certain types, before creating pictures with cotton wool or tissue paper.



Tip: Make inexpensive weather resource boxes that are readily available for sudden changes in conditions. Create categories such as rain, wind and sun to extend outdoor learning with items such as wind socks or containers to catch and measure the rainfall.

Maintaining your space

Now is the time to give your outdoor area a 'spring clean' to ensure that it's a safe and inspiring place to be. Repair any fencing that may be damaged by the wind or any trellis that's come loose during winter. Give the ground area a good check over and look for loose patio slabs and pathways to ensure that grouting between stone and surfacing hasn't deteriorated. Also, jet-wash areas that may have developed any green, slimy moss in the damper months.

Tip: Maintenance of your outdoors may involve a variety of groups and individuals. It's always worth doing a 'skills' audit on the parents and volunteers at your setting to establish if you have any extra labour available. Parental help allows you to share your outdoor play objectives.

Tip: Why not create an easy-to-maintain butterfly garden by growing plants that are attractive to your local species of butterfly. Or try breeding the butterflies yourself with a butterfly breeding kit. These come with a mesh pavilion, caterpillars and food. The children can release the butterflies once they've emerged from their cocoons. See spottygreenfrog.co.uk for details.

Dates for your diary

Celebrate a patron saint or embark on an Easter egg hunt...

March 17th: St Patrick's Day

Celebrate and enjoy all things Irish. Identify and collect shamrocks (clover), or try making Irish soda bread and have a picnic. Explore gaelic words or phrases or ask the children to wear green and try some traditional Irish dancing in the grounds. You could invite the parents to come along and watch.

April: Easter

Try an outdoor role-play of the arrival of Jesus into Jerusalem on a donkey by

providing hobby horses to ride and 'palm' branches to wave. Outdoor Easter egg hunts are also very popular activities. Experiment with dyeing or decorating eggs at your setting.

April 23rd: St George's Day

According to legend, St George was a fearless knight and a slayer of dragons. Recreate this legend with an outdoor drama. Use chalks to draw the flag of St George to reclaim it from its current status as an English football logo.