



WORDS FROM THE WOODS

Week 13– 29th June 2020

Tips and ideas for learning and connecting outdoors during Covid-19...

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Plant Power

Plants are where it all starts with life on our planet, they capture the sunlight and turn the light energy into food stores which help them grow. Other creatures then might have a munch and get some sun energy from the plant too to help them grow, which is why I think plants are so amazing. Of course, Forest School takes place in amongst some of our biggest plants, trees. I feel so happy when I am amongst trees and we will look at why in a minute. We will also look at the plant life cycle as I have been enjoying the fruits of plants and spotting seeds on my local walks. Then we can have some fun with the plants and go foraging again to make some Pineapple Weed drink and ice lollies!

Helpful Plants

So why do trees make me feel so happy? Well we will once again dip into some brain science to see why. The linear branching patterns that the veins in leaves make are called fractals and can be seen in ice crystals, snowflakes, rivers and tributaries, pine cones and of course tree branches. When humans evolved, they were foragers who observed nature's fractals constantly and the brain evolved to process them quickly as it was essential for survival. So, when we now observe any fractals it relaxes and soothes us as this is our natural state, it can reduce stress by as much as 60% according to some scientists (see here

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/innovation/fractal-patterns-nature-and-art-are-aesthetically-pleasing-and-stress-reducing-180962738/>). The many different shades of green to be found in the leaves of a woodland are also a calming factor as generally the colour green is regarded as calming, but the other surprise is that when we move amongst plants the plants release phytoncides, tiny scent particles trees and plants release to ward off disease and harmful substances, which we then breathe in. These phytoncides have been shown to decrease cortisol, the stress chemical in our brain, which in turn reduces our heart rate, plus it can increase NK cell production, which is effective against cancers. This has been found through research into Forest Bathing, a Japanese practice called Shinrin Yoku, which is becoming increasingly popular for well-being. You can see a research paper here

<https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/asp/asl/2018/00000024/00000009/art00094>

If you want a little bit of extra calmness then why not go for a walk in nature and maybe collect leaves to look at and draw back at home, then breathe in the scents of a woodland and take advantage of nature's free medicine. However, plants help us in so many other ways too. Why not get a big piece of paper and draw a picture of a plant in the centre or write 'How are plants useful?' then write lots of ideas all around. Here are a few to start you: food; shade; oxygen; fun; to make things... Where would we be without plants!

The life of a plant

In my garden and on walks through the past months I have been able to observe the life cycle of plants. First, we had the tiny shoots of early Spring then the plants got bigger; next the first flowers appeared (often on the trees); which the bees and pollinators visited and now we have many fruits and seeds forming and some are even ready to eat! Why not go on a walk and see if you can spot any seeds, fruit or even nuts beginning to form on trees and plants. Here are some of the things I have spotted.



The flowers of the Elder have now been replaced with the berries, which are small and green at the moment, but will turn a dark purple/red in the Autumn.

Some of the yummy berries around at the moment to be picked and turned into a pudding. Why not go fruit picking at a fruit farm near you? Cherries are good just now and they are an ideal outdoor place for social distancing



You can see on the Bramble bush the flowers and the newly forming Blackberries that should be ready in August/September to eat



Here you can see the Cow Parsley we saw in the video when making the Dandelion Trumpets have now got green seeds forming. These will dry out and go brown.

The Sticky Weed/Goosegrass/Cleavers of a couple of weeks ago that we made nests from have little round green ball that have seeds in them. Open one up and see what they are like.

Finally we can see some of the helicopter seeds of the Sycamore tree looking young and fresh and we mustn't forget that grasses have flowers and then develop seeds too...



Fun with plants

Throughout these newsletters we have used plants for several things like dandelion trumpets; elderflower cordial; stick fairies and magic wands. In the video this week we look at some more fun little games you can play with plants, do I like butter or not?... I also read a book all about ten tall oak trees and what happens through the years. You can watch it here <https://youtu.be/awk64x8UjeQ> just be aware my phone got a notification whilst filming so there is a loud bing! Also, there is a funny moment when I get attacked by a hammock, which my daughter found hilarious. Other ideas are to do some crayon rubbings of any leaves you find or of the bark of a tree. Maybe you can identify the trees or plants. There are some good id charts and leaf hunts here <http://treetoolsforschools.org.uk/categorymenu/?cat=activities>



Foraging fun

We couldn't have a newsletter all about plants without having a foraging recipe, so this week I tried out this one for Pineapple Weed Cordial and ice lollies from the book Foraging with

Pineapple Weed Cordial and Ice Lollies

1.6l water

1.5kg sugar

Zest and juice of 1 lemon

20 Pineapple Weed flowers and leaves, washed and dried

Kids by Adele Nozedar. The Pineapple Weed is one that you have probably walked past on a path as they like growing on hard ground. If you crush the funny dome shaped flower it actually smells a bit like pineapple and you can always have a little nibble of the flower and leaf, once well washed, and see if it tastes like pineapple



too. In my version I think I may of caramelised the liquid so can only taste sugar, but hopefully you will produce something amazing tasting!



1. Put all ingredients, except the pineapple weed, into a large saucepan and boil until the liquid has reduced by about half. Remove from the heat and while the liquid is still hot add the flowers and leave to cool completely.
2. Once cool, strain through a clean tea towel in a sieve to remove the flowers
3. Store the cordial in sterilised bottles or jars. This can then be diluted with water to make a tasty drink. It should keep well in the fridge or you can freeze it
4. To make lollies simply pour into lolly mould and pop in the freezer.

Wild forever!

Just two more days of the Wildlife Trusts 30 Days Wild project. What will you do and will you carry on with more days of wildness? Here are two of the last ideas, I like the idea of giving something back to nature for all the benefits it brings us...



You can find the Wildlife Trusts 30 Days Wild pack here for lots of ideas and a wallchart to keep a record of your wild acts <https://action.wildlifetrusts.org/page/57739/petition/1>

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