



WORDS FROM THE WOOD

Week 3- 6th April 2020

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

In this issue:

- Growing with Nature
- How does your garden grow?
- Growing food
- Growing for wildlife
- A tasty treat!

Growing with Nature...

The warmer weather seems to be here for a little, which is lovely leading up to the bank holidays at the weekend. Hopefully your families will find a way to relax and have fun. This week's newsletter is a follow on from the sense of taste from last week, when we mentioned tasting the things that nature provides. Easily done, with most of our food growing in nature and all beginning with the sun. Sometimes I talk about plants, including the fruit and vegetables we eat, being 'Sun Munchers' that take the energy from the sun and turn it into food. Then if a little creature nibbles a leaf, or a person eats an apple, they get some of that energy the plant made from the sun. Amazing, to think we all have some of the sun's energy in us and are all connected to those amazing things that grow around us! Even the 'Animal Munchers' that then eat the 'Plant Munchers'. So, this week is all about growing things and there is something tasty to forage and eat too- all really important ways of making that nature connection.

How does your garden grow?...

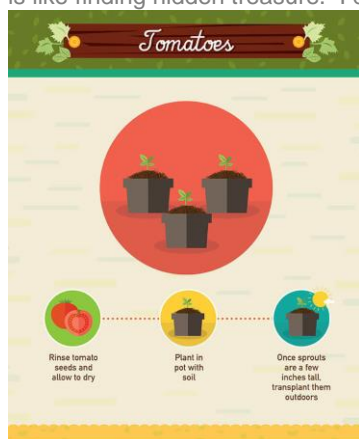
Gardening can be a bit of an experiment to see what works and what doesn't (especially in my garden!) and it doesn't even need to be in a garden, you may have a garden windowsill. We can't go to the garden centre to get gardening supplies, but we can use some of the things around us or, if really keen to have something particular, you can order still at the moment. The picture here from Kids in Transition to School is great in pointing out some useful hacks using items you will probably have around the house. If there is nothing to use to plant in then use some wide strips of newspaper; wrap it round a rolling pin; hold in place with tape then take off and fold up a bottom and stick with tape again. For compost you can use soil with some kitchen scraps added for extra nutrients such as used coffee grinds; ground eggshell; chopped banana skin; the water from boiled vegetables and you could pour out the juices from the bottom of your food waste bin. See this webpage for more detail

<https://www.gracefullittlehoneybee.com/improve-your-garden-soil-for-free-using-kitchen-scrap/>



Growing food

Growing something that you can then eat is great fun, I especially love digging up the potatoes with children, as it is like finding hidden treasure. I do find children enjoy fresh food they have grown themselves and are much more likely to try tasting it. The fact that I can grow some food that I know has had no chemicals added and is as locally grown as it can get is great, plus I am learning skills that would allow me to become more self-sufficient and less dependent on supermarkets!



The picture on the previous page suggests you can use the seeds from the food you already have, such as tomatoes and cucumbers. This link here will take you to a Facebook page where they have lots of ideas of food you can use the seeds of, including cucumber and potatoes.

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2204963259558767> Or this Food Revolution Website is great for ideas of using food you may already have too such as the tomatoes, carrots, onions and I want to try the mushrooms. One thing to be wary of is that not all the suggestions will grow particularly well in our climate (or could turn into something rather large!) and most of will need to start off in the windowsill to give them plenty of light and

warmth to get started. <https://foodrevolution.org/blog/reduce-food-waste-regrow-from-scrap/>

Growing for Wildlife

If you want to grow tasty fruit and veg it is really important that you grow and design things that will help wildlife too. This can help with pests and problems, although I always accept that I will share some of the food we grow with nature too! For example, if you have plants that encourage pollinating butterflies, bees and other insects then they will pollinate your food plants too. Many species of insect populations are under serious threat- 35 species of UK bees could become extinct soon. So, some really simple ways to wild your garden for insects are:

- * *Plant flowers that have the Bee symbol on them, this means they are pollen rich and good for all pollinating insects*
- * *Delay cutting your grass as long as possible so that the little flowers in the grass are available for insects, especially at the beginning of the year when there is not so much pollen around*
- * *Leave a section of grass uncut, maybe at the edge of your garden, or somewhere out of the way. Maybe you could make it a feature, a circle or maybe a maze. Wait and see what different grasses pop up or flowers, cut in Spring and then again at the end of Summer, leaving the cuttings so seeds can disperse.*
- * *Leave leaves in the Autumn under hedges or in corners of your garden for insects to hibernate in the winter*
- * *Other good hibernation spots are cut wood, plant cuttings, stone piles, in fact making sure you are not too tidy will give hiding places for insects and other creatures too- frogs; newts and hedgehogs will all use these untidy patches to hide in and these guys will eat the slugs that might munch on your veg!*
- * *You can also make an invertebrate or 'bug' home by tying a bunch of twigs together or filling an empty food tin with twigs, OR go big and build a Bug Mansion. Look up online for plenty of ideas for this or here at the Wildlife Trust actions page <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions>*

However, if you only have a small space there is this fantastic idea from the Wildlife Trust for making a mini nature reserve on the next page:

How to Make a mini nature reserve

wildlife
watch



- 1 Choose your site**
Choose a safe place to put your window box – somewhere like an old bench or wall at an easy height for inspection.
- 2 Gather your materials**

 - window box
 - a small log
 - yoghurt pot
 - some compost
 - a rock
- 3 Fill the box with compost**
Always use peat-free compost and save our precious peat bags.
- 4 Add a few features**
Dig in the yoghurt pot and add the small log and rock.
- 5 Leave!**
- 6 Keep a diary**
Record the changes you see. Make notes using guidebooks and take a photo every week.
- 7 Management**
Remove out of control plants or cut them back with scissors.

www.wildlifewatch.org.uk

with thanks to patrick roper for original idea (windowboxwildlife.blogspot.com)

A tasty treat!

If you can't wait for your food to grow then we can forage something that there is usually plenty of right now, which is the Stinging Nettle. This can be made into the famous Forest School favourite- Nettle Pesto! Foraging for food is a great way to be in touch with the seasons and find out the secret tastes of nature. When foraging you must make sure you have correctly identified the plant and that you are only taking a little of something that there is plenty of. Nettles are a very important food plant for several butterfly caterpillars, so leaving a patch of nettles in your garden is another great way to help wildlife. Here is how to make the yummy Nettle Pesto...



ONE This time of year is when nettles are at their tastiest. First make sure you have identified the nettle correctly using the SEEK app, the Dead Nettle is very similar, but usually has large white flowers. The leaves of the Dead Nettle do not sting and are in fact edible too, you can even suck the nectar from the base of the flowers.

Using rubber gloves, or other thick gloves that the sting will not penetrate, pick the top leaves from the plant. Pick enough to fill a colander. Then rinse the nettles to clean off any bird poo or creatures. I then use scissors to chop the nettles, a nice easy way to chop them, without having to touch them. If you do get stung then the medical advice is to wash away the stinging part as soon as possible, rubbing it will only rub in the irritant. After washing it you could then try the more traditional remedies of Dock or Plantain leaves to soothe it, again make sure to

identify correctly, Dock leaves are a similar size and shape as Lords and Ladies, which is poisonous.



TWO You then need to put the nettles into a mortar where you can grind them up with the rest of the ingredients which can be pine nuts/sunflower seeds; sea salt; garlic crushed/powder or you may find wild garlic leaves, which are also out at the moment (again id properly as similar to Lords and Ladies, the smell should give it away though!) and olive oil. You can add your own variations too and experiment with what works.



THREE Keep mashing and grinding the ingredients together to make a paste



FOUR Time to taste it! You can try on a cracker, or toast or even some pasta. It is SO yummy and zingy, I am going to have to go and make some now... and it won't sting if you have ground up the nettles well enough. You could blitz it in a blender too. Other nettle recipes are nettle tea; soup and crisp. Nettles were used in the past much more for food and can be made into cloth and string (another newsletter for that again!). Have fun and there will be another newsletter in two weeks' time as we take a holiday next week.

play • learn • connect