

# Outdoor Explorers

*Nature-based activities for young children*



*Written by Victoria Billington at Flo's in Oxford  
with ideas & illustrations by Stig*

# Outdoor Explorers

*Nature-based activities for young children*



## Welcome to Flo's 1<sup>st</sup> activity booklet!

**Packed full of nature activities, we hope this booklet will help explorers of all ages have fun and learn outdoors.**

### At risk of having fun

Some of these activities involve mess or tools, and may pose a small risk of harm, especially if you're rushing. Exploring and learning about risks and safety is important, and making mistakes is a great way to learn. Please be reminded these ideas are for supervised activities, where it is great to plan ahead, prepare for some mud, and look after each other.

### We welcome your feedback and ideas

Got ideas to add? We welcome your comments and feedback to help shape future projects and publications.

Email: [victoria@flosoxford.org.uk](mailto:victoria@flosoxford.org.uk)

See the Flo's Community Team web-page:

[www.flosoxford.org.uk/community](http://www.flosoxford.org.uk/community)



*Special thanks to Children in Need for making this booklet possible.*

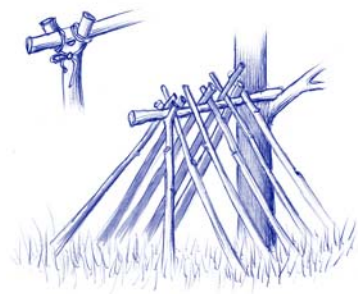
*Thanks to  
Makena Lohr,  
Michelle Hunter,  
and Daniel Rhodes  
for assisting this  
project.*

### About Flo's

Flo's is a community-owned social enterprise where people meet, work, play, create, learn, eat and connect. We work to provide better local opportunities, reduce inequalities and support the environment. Based within the beautiful grounds of Florence Park in East Oxford, England, we are open everyday, and welcome a wide range of visitors to our café, nursery, refill shop and community space. See our website: [www.flosoxford.org.uk](http://www.flosoxford.org.uk)

**Victoria** is the Family and Community Worker at Flo's. She is experienced in children's theatre, education and community support. She is passionate about nature in education, inclusive and accessible spaces and crafting.

**Stig** is an illustrator, designer & printer. He likes bikes, repairs, woodwork, solidarity, music, growing food and cooking. See: [stig.net](http://stig.net)



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*Let's go play outside!*



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# Treasure Hunt

What gifts of nature can you find?

What type or species is it?

- ☐ Leaf
- ☐ Bird
- ☐ Cloud
- ☐ Flower
- ☐ Seed
- ☐ Stone
- ☐ Tree
- ☐ Squirrel
- ☐ Pinecone



## Follow the clues

*With a bit of preparation  
a helpful person might be able  
to write a series of clues, maybe  
in rhyming couplets, with each  
clue leading to the location of  
the next clue, in a garden,  
home or park.  
The final location could include  
a 'treasure' of some sort -  
a game, snack or toy.*



# Animal Detective

Can you find clues of animals?

Footprints in mud, sand or snow



Mouse



Cat



Dog



Squirrel



Duck



Hedgehog



Fox



Deer



Rabbit



Sheep



Frog



Chicken



Pig



Badger

Or...



## Other clues:

nests, shells of nuts,  
webs, feathers, holes,  
droppings, bat-boxes,  
egg shells, slime trails  
and bird-feeders.

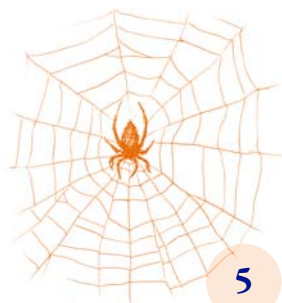
What animals can you  
see?



hear?

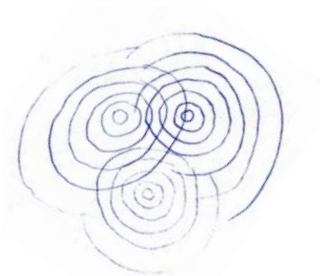


smell?



# Rainy Day Bingo

No need to hide inside on a rainy day,  
grab your wellies then splash and play.



**Dance in the rain**



**Paint with mud**



**Make rain potion**



**Make a mud pie**



**Catch rain drops  
on your tongue**



**Measure the rain**



**Puddle jumping**



**Race leaves in a  
stream or river**



**Find a rainbow**



6

Can you think  
of any more fun  
rainy-day activities?



# Early Years Entomology

Look under rocks and logs, or hiding higher up in a tree.

Be quiet and gentle with these friends. Which ones can you see?

Can you spot creatures from the 5 insect orders?

## Lepidoptera (butterflies & moths)



*Brimstone Moth*



*Cabbage White Butterfly*

## Hemiptera (true bugs)



*Aphid*



*True bug*

## Diptera (flies)



*Common Fly*



*Mosquito*

## Coleoptera (beetles)

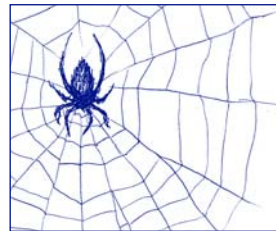


*Ground Beetle*



*Weevil*

Which insects are hoppers?  
Flyers? Crawlers? Diggers?  
Walkers? Runners?



### Spiders

...are not insects.  
They belong to  
the Arachnid  
order along with  
mites, ticks and  
scorpions.

## Hymenoptera (ants, bees & wasps)



*Ant*



*Bee*



*Wasp*

What others did you find?

# Build a Bug Bedroom

Use natural materials to make a marvellous mansion for minibeasts.

Collect strips of wood, moss, dried leaves, woodchips, bark, pinecones, twigs, stems, sand, soil and more. Crawling creatures will be attracted to warm dry spaces.

Short lengths of hollow bamboo are great for flying bugs. Bamboo can be hard to saw so be careful and watch out for splinters.

Centipedes, spiders and woodlice love loose bark and dead wood. Ladybirds, beetles and bugs enjoy dry leaves and sticks or straw.

Wire or strong string can be used to tie up the bundle. Imagine how rain will affect your creation - does it need more leaves overhanging?



## Where to hang it?

Choose a quiet and sheltered part of your patio or garden, away from strong winds and ideally out of reach from pets.



## Other ways to help wildlife:

A shallow **water bowl** for insects and birds to bathe and drink

**Don't use pesticides**

Leave part of your garden **wild**

**Small holes in fences** (CD-sized) for hedgehogs and other small animals

A **pond** with a ramp for little creatures to easily get in and out

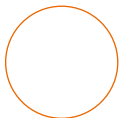




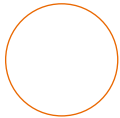
# Rainbow Explorers

What natural things can you find in these colours?

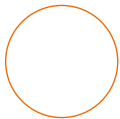
Red



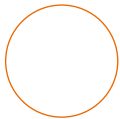
Orange



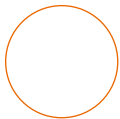
Yellow



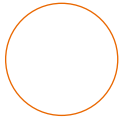
Green



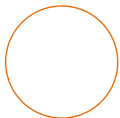
Blue



Indigo



Violet




Maybe seek:

- Flowers
- Seeds
- Beetles
- Amphibians
- Leaves
- Fruit
- Sky
- Stones
- Clothes
- Eyes
- Clay
- Chalk
- Sand

## Colour in the circles

With crayons or coloured pencils someone could colour in each of the seven circles.

What makes a rainbow?



[wikipedia.org/  
wiki/Rainbow](https://wikipedia.org/wiki/Rainbow)

# Outdoor Quests

**Chalk drawing**



**Make a nature wand**



**Observe nearby animals**



**Hug a tree**



**Roll down a hill**



**Teddy Bears Picnic**

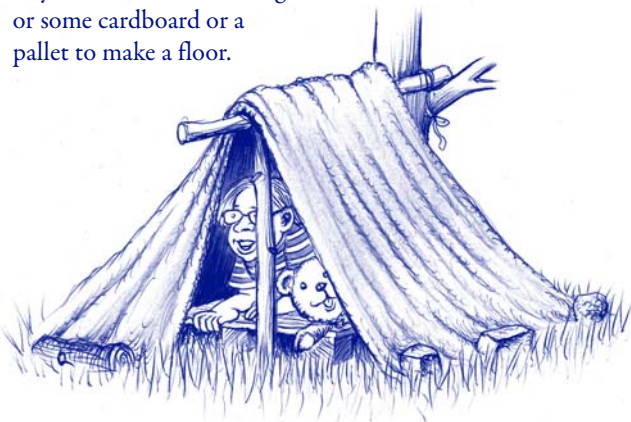
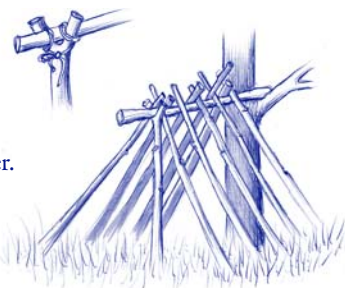


**Build a den**

Lean sticks or planks against a fence or tree. String or wire could help hold some key bits together.

A cloth cover can keep the sun out. A tarp will even keep the rain out.

The floor may get muddy so you could use an old rug or some cardboard or a pallet to make a floor.



**Have  
a race**



**Hopscotch**



**Draw  
around  
your  
shadow**



**Leaf rubbing**



**Dress  
up a  
pinecone**



**Make a nature crown**



**Make a fairy garden**



**Other ideas:**

Climb a tree

Make a dream-catcher

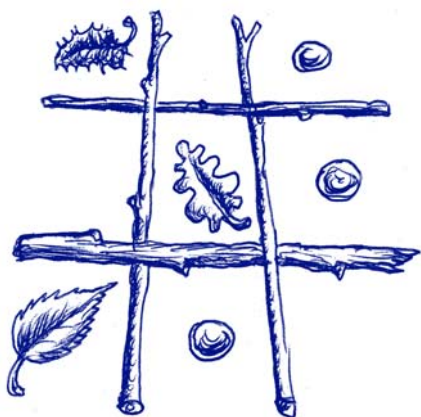
Write a poem or Sing a song

Make a friendship bracelet

Go somewhere new

Fly a kite

# Games with Nature



## Giant Noughts & Crosses

*Make a giant 'tick-tack-toe' game on the ground.*

*Take turns to place your natural counter (leaf or pebble) in one of the nine squares. The first to get 3 in a row wins that round.*



## Memory game

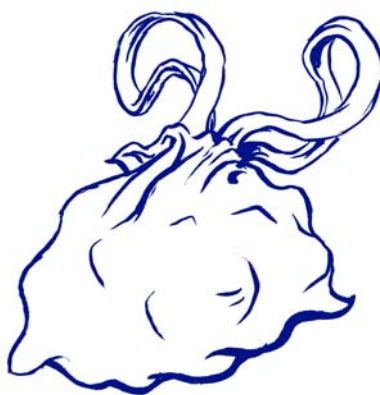
*Gather a pile of 5 to 10 natural items. Let everyone see them. Cover with a cloth. Remove one item. Remove the cover and ask if the other(s) can say which one is missing.*



## Pick up sticks

*Drop sticks as a loose bunch on the ground.*

*Take turns to remove just one stick at a time from the pile without moving any of the other sticks.*



## What's in the bag

*Put into a cloth bag natural items like leaves, rocks, sticks, petals etc. Using just your hands (no peeking) put your hand in the bag to feel an item and guess what it is, or describe what you can feel and your partner can guess.*



# Art from Nature

Make a picture on the ground with found objects



Sticks and stones are often easy to find. Leaves and feathers can be beautiful but the wind may carry them away. You could also use nuts, petals, bark, shells, seed-pods, string, sand, clothes or toys. 'Ephemeral Art' does not last long, so ask an adult to take a picture of your art.





# Snow Day Play

Wrap up warm, and grab your gloves;  
here are some games we think you'll love:

**Rolling snowballs** bigger and bigger is how to make the parts of a **snowman**. Adding twig arms, a carrot nose and a hat can make it look more alive.



Making **snow-angels** is quick and fun! But beware: try not to get snow up your sleeves or in your shoes.



With a lot of snow, time and some helpers you could:

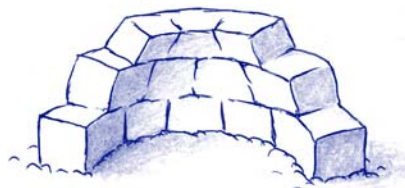
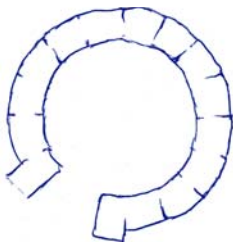
## Make an igloo



Collect lots of snow, scoop it into an old recycling box, stamp it down hard! Because it has tapered sides you can create tapered **snow-bricks**.

Lie the snow-bricks on their side in a circle with the wider faces turned outwards. Leave a gap for a door.

New layers can lean inwards to create a dome.



# Sunny and Safe

## Sunshine is great!

It warms up the land and all life and the plants need it to grow.

Too much sun can lead to sunburn, sunstroke and eye damage.

Lets help each other stay safe.

## Sunny Day essentials:

- Sunscreen
- Shoulders covered
- Sunhat
- Sunglasses
- Shade
- And lots of water!

## Build a Shade Den



The top rope needs to be strong and attached to trees, fences or sturdy poles. An old sheet can make a good cover but beware of wind catching it like a sail.

To attach guy-ropes to the corners of the sheet, make simple knots in the 4 corners and then use a 'larks foot' knot to attach 4 short ropes to these corners.

## Larks' Foot knot:



# Outside Orchestra

Close your eyes, tune in to sound.

What can you hear all around?

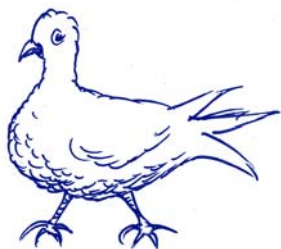


What can you hear from  
**animals**, from **people**,  
from the **weather**, from  
the world around you?



To listen to the best  
**bird song**, get up early  
between the months of  
March and June.

Some chicks call out for  
food from their nests.



Sounds we found:

# Make a Hammock

Two big trees, some rope and some strong cloth...



**A hammock is a great place for tired people to chat, read, rest or snooze.**

Hammocks can also be a fun swing, a climbing pod, an explorer's canoe, a pirate ship or a flying space-craft!

The **cloth** should be quite strong like denim or a curtain. Avoid them staying wet as they may start to rot.

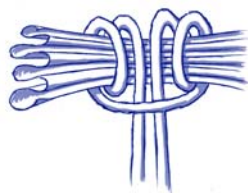
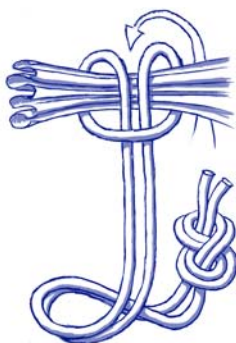
Small children will be safer with a taut hammock slung quite low to the ground. Cushions and blankets can make them more comfortable.

Long hammocks can take three or more people which can be great fun! A very taut hammock can be rolled much like a canoist doing an kayak roll - wrap the cloth around you like a cocoon, then flip sideways and hang on tight!

**Hammocks are a shoe-free zone!**

## Prusik Knot

...is a clever and safe knot at the ends. It can easily be loosened to slide the cloth through, to make the hammock lower or higher. It starts as a Larks Foot knot, but has an extra loop or two added:



## Figure-of-8 Knot

...is a strong and safe knot to make a secure loop of rope. Both ends feed through to make the shape of a figure of '8'.

Once tightened it is very strong but can be quite hard to untie.



# Know our Flowers

## Feeding insects & sharing beauty

Wildflowers are great for bees, flies, butterflies and some beetles. Look for these common flowers and tick off (or colour in) the ones you spot.

**Bluebells** (April - June)



**Daisy** (March - Oct)



**Snowdrops** (Dec - March)



**Buttercups** (April - Oct)



**Dandelion** (May - Oct)



**Thistle** (July - Sep)



**Cow Parsley** (April - June)



**Forget Me Not** (April - July)



**White Clover** (June - Sep)





# Basic Foraging

## DO:

**Make sure you have permission** to enter private land and to forage there.

**Leave plenty for others and for animals**, and enough that plants can reproduce.

**Take all your litter home.**

**Make sure it is clean!** In the countryside hedges may have farming chemicals on them, and where dogs walk low plants may have been widdled on! Fruit and leaves growing near a busy road may be contaminated from exhaust fumes. Peeling fruit may be wise. **Wash anything you will eat.**

**Leave alone anything that is rare** and protected, harmful to eat, or poisonous.

## DON'T:

**Don't disturb the habitat** or cause harm to local wildlife.

**Don't damage or trample the area.**

**Don't uproot plants**, instead pick leaves or berries with care.

**Don't eat a wild plant, fungus or fruit unless you are completely certain of what it is.**

## Some plants to look out for:

### Ramsoms (spring)

- wild garlic - great in salads or sandwiches

### Nettles (spring)

- wear gloves! Full of vitamins and minerals. Young leaves make a great tea or go well in a stew

### Daisies (spring) - young

flowers and leaves can be eaten raw or cooked or as a tea

### Dandelion (spring)

- leaves and flowers go well in a stew or in fritters

### Ground elder (spring)

- young leaves are rich in vitamin C, good in a soup or salad

### Mallow (spring) - seeds

and leaves are very nutritious if cooked

### Elderflowers (June)

- can be used in battered fritters or to make a cordial

### Blackberries (July)

- a tasty treat but watch out for thorns

See Robin Harford's excellent online foraging guide here:  
[www.eatweeds.co.uk](http://www.eatweeds.co.uk)



# Resources for Outdoor Play

## Recommended websites, books and places to visit

### Websites

[www.woodcraftfolk.org.uk](http://www.woodcraftfolk.org.uk)  
[www.playsafe.org.uk](http://www.playsafe.org.uk)  
[www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/  
visiting-woods/things-to-do/](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/things-to-do/)  
[www.rspb.org.uk/fun-and-learning/](http://www.rspb.org.uk/fun-and-learning/)  
[www.thimbleandtwig.com/  
category/nature-activities/](http://www.thimbleandtwig.com/category/nature-activities/)  
[www.flosoxford.org.uk/community](http://www.flosoxford.org.uk/community)

### Books for young learners

*The Big Book of Bugs* by Yuval Zommer  
*Tiny Explorers: Into the Wild* by Miro Tartan  
*My First Outdoor Book* by Minna Lacey and Abigail Wheatley  
*Nature Trail: A joyful rhyming celebration of the natural wonders found in our gardens* by Benjamin Zephaniah

### Books

*The Stick Book* by Fiona Danks and Jo Scholfield  
*Everyone Wins: Cooperative Games and Activities for All Ages* by Josette and Ba Luvmour  
*Forest School Adventure* by Naomi Walmsley and Dan Westall  
*Songs for Nature's Playground: Forest School Songs for 3-7 Year Olds* by Emily Ifsits  
*101 Fun Outdoor Activities for Children* by Fiona Bird

### Outdoor play in Oxford

**Parks and Walking spots:** Headington Hill Park, South Park, Florence Park, Aston's Eyot and the Kidneys, Warneford Meadow, Angel and Greyhound Meadow (on the River Cherwell), Shotover Country Park, Boundary Brook Nature Reserve & more.

**Community Gardens:** Hogacre Common, Barracks Lane & Oxford City Farm.

**Splash parks:** Lake Street (South Oxford) & Cutteslowe Park (North Oxford).

### NaturEscape in Florence Park

Flo's - The Place in the Park, Oxford Garden Partners and The Oxford City Council Parks Department partnered up to bring new life to a corner of Florence park. We've transformed the dilapidated mini golf area into the beautiful NaturEscape project.

**This fenced-off, dog-free area encourages more diverse native ecologies. It is for the whole community to use.**

When not being used by the Flo's Nature Nursery or other local community groups, it is open to the public for outdoor learning and play, or as a great picnic spot! If you run a group, school, nursery or other community activity you are welcome to book the NaturEscape (there is no cost for this). Please email: [victoria@flosoxford.org.uk](mailto:victoria@flosoxford.org.uk)

Got ideas to add? We are keen to share good links so please let us know of other useful websites, books and resources. Please email: [victoria@flosoxford.org.uk](mailto:victoria@flosoxford.org.uk)