Keep it Simple

Niki Willows
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Hello, hello and thank you for opening my little book. Well, it’s hardly a book but publication sounds too grand. Pamphlet may be? Perhaps ‘booklet’ or shall we just say pdf? Ok there we are pdf will do just fine.

So where were we, oh yes, thanks for opening it, it’s a little project I’ve been thinking about for a while and then I signed up for the Screw Work Let’s Play 30 Day Challenge which has actually made me focus on it and more importantly DO it!

It’s a collection of simple ideas to do outside. I have thoroughly enjoyed making the things and then photographing them, I do love taking photos. It’s not aimed at anyone in particular (I did it for ME!) but I do have a background in Forest school, Early years, SEN and Play. It sometimes seems to me that people don’t like going outside and when they do go outside they don’t know what to do. So this is simple stuff that you don’t need to buy anything to do.

These are not original ideas but things I’ve seen online or that my children have made in the past. It’s not linked to the curriculum because to be honest I don’t really have a lot of time for that. I just like playing but if you want to link stuff in then you go right ahead.

So thanks to Sam for technical help including lending me his lap-top when mine died (yes again, I have no idea what I do to them either) Thanks to Charlie for proof reading. And to Liz Knowles at Muddy Faces and Kierna Corr at Learning for Life for being lovely ladies who share the most wonderful things and Deb Millar for the tea light idea and the Forest Education Initiative Facebook group who always have an answer for everything.

Last but not least thanks to the SWLP 30 Day Challenge who got me making and playing and photographing again.
Leaf Snap

Put on your wellies or flip flops and get out there, this is an any time of year activity. Send off each person to collect ten random leaves; any leaves, long, short, fat, thin, grass, holly, (maybe not nettles) red ones, green ones and yellow ones.

Bring them all back and each person stacks theirs in a pile. Find a good flat log, stone or piece of ground, sit around it and play SNAP!

And if all the leaves are exactly the same you can have a good old kick or pick them up and just throw them around.
Leaf puppets

Oooh there are some lovely shaped leaves out there, you could make a whole family of puppets and probably even pets too if you’re much more creative than me.

I have also seen these done with googly eyes too AND today I saw a roll of stickers (like a sellotape roll) of all sorts of eyes. Don’t know where you get them from but they would be great to have in your bag.

Anyway, find a leaf and make sure it is dry, add some stickers for eyes and a mouth and off you go! If you want to make a theatre cover a box with pva and twigs – it takes ages to dry mind – and add some swag style leaves for curtains and you’re away – bring on Romeo and Juliette.
Hollow Stems

These are very handy things and are found in bamboo and umbelliferous plants (fabulous word that) so cow parsley and lovage are good and fennel smells scrumptious. Bamboo is good too but really hard and shiny like plastic and can be difficult to cut.

You can also push the pith out of elder stems to make a hollow stick too. Elder has lots of folklore attached to it and can apparently keep witches away. So to stay on the right side of elder always ask if you can take a piece and then say thank you, and don’t burn it – it lets the witches out and if you’ve ever read any Roald Dahl you won’t want that to happen.

Things to do with hollow stems – make some beads and cover with glitter – These are cow parsley beads which are very delicate so only for uber-gentle princess types. Covering them with glitter and pva gives them a bit of a hard shell (but not much!) Do you like my absolutely ingenious bead drying invention? Wooden skewer and potato combo, pretty inventive I thought.
Bug Houses

There are many, many different bug houses; some are bug hotels because obviously bugs need a holiday just like the rest of us, and there are even mansions. The simplest are a carpet tile, bit of lino or a log left on the ground and then checked under after a week or so. Or you could even do all three and see who lives under what. But we’re talking hollow stems here so this bug house is made from elder. You need to poke the pith (careful how you say that) out with a tent peg or similar blunt long thing. Please use your common sense when poking, you don’t want to puncture your thigh or take your eye out.

I’ve also added some bamboo in and peeled a bit of the bark from the elder to make it pretty. Tie them up and fill all the gaps with other twigs.
Wands and staffs

Crucial tools of the trade for many a good game. I found a beautiful purple feather so cut a bit of bamboo, dipped it in glitter then added the feather and a marvellous red leaf that I nicked from the tree by the Post Office. A thoroughly good wand I think you’ll agree. If you’re a HP fan (not the sauce) you’ll know it can sometimes take a while to find the right wand so don’t give up if it’s not right the first time.

Staffs are most important not only for rendering any enemies senseless but also for knocking on doors in a very noisy way, and pushing through hedges made solely of thorns that have grown up around sleeping princesses. So back to the PO for more gorgeous leaves, a stout stick and some string. The string winding increases gripyness and power by 100%. Don’t go poking anyone in the eye with a sharp stick though.
Elf and Fairy Food

Usually they clear up after themselves but every now and then if you pop down the end of the garden or look under that tatty hedge on the way to work you’ll find a left over meal. Some elf or fairy who is a little slovenly and maybe had too much elderberry wine the night before and didn’t feel like washing up.

You can also leave them some food and maybe they’ll take it, maybe they won’t. They can be rather fussy.

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**Crowns and Wreaths**

Blimey where do I start, there are just so many options that this might even take two pages. Sheer madness, I know.

Ok – here’s the trixy bit; the bendy stuff. It has to be bendy or you’ll just be snapping little twigs all over the place. So, top three bendy plants are Ivy, willow and jasmine. If you’re putting this on your head just be aware of any allergies you have. For instance if you were allergic to haddock and you made a crown from haddock that would, quite frankly, be ridiculous.

So here’s a photo of a jasmine and ivy mix, quite simple I’m sure you’ll agree and beautifully photographed on a fence in Bristol. It’s just a case of twisting it round into a circle that will fit your head and tucking the ends in. Once you’ve done that Bob’s your Uncle (although mine is called Martin) and you can add allsorts to it to jazz it up a bit.

For autumn crowns you may like a few lovely bright leaves and berries such as this one here. If you’ve spotted that this is just the jasmine ivy mix with a few additions well done, you’re going to love the next page.
Crowns and Wreaths (cont...)

Yes it is that simple; just poke things in. If you happen to have some craft stuff handy you can add ribbons and all sorts and go for a May Queen Moment if you fancy. You could try icicles for a Snow Queen but I’m not sure you’d have much luck. If you crack that one (no pun intended) send me a photo.

Now you may be wondering why I mentioned wreaths too and the first photo was a bit of a clue. If you take your crown and hang it vertically on the front door it is magically and instantly transformed into something seasonal that a domestic goddess would make, Clever eh?

You can go barking seasonal mad with this one actually. Obviously there’s the Christmas tinsel and baubles combo but you could do chocolate eggs for Easter (as long as it’s not a warm one) and a couple of hefty pumpkins will really jazz up your front door for Halloween, could be too heavy for your crown though.
**Berry Hearts**

Ok a bright berry is a beautiful thing but they are really for the Elves, fairies and birds to eat. So only take what you need and preferably from somewhere that it would be difficult for the birds to get them anyway, like the bottom of the tree. The elves and fairies fly in ON the birds (obviously a load of berries is far too heavy for their delicate wings) so that works for them too.

This is dead simple. Cut out a shape, cover it in pva and drop berries on it. If you put a hole in it before the pva you can hang it up too.
Leaf Drawing

No, you do not have to draw a leaf. You have to find a shiny leaf to draw ON. My niece Molly and I found some cracking leaves in London near where they live and got stuck in with gold and silver markers. Here are a couple of hers...

I also found some bright leaves on my front lawn (and was bending down to pick them up and didn’t see Steve the Postie come round the corner and nearly jumped out of my skin!) So I had a go on my own too, you know you want to...

Please remember that leaves are also green as well as all that autumn show off stuff. But there will be a little showing off on the next page.
Circles

Making a circle is not too tricky – look at this one I found on a beach in Wales clearly just made by the incoming tide.

So there you go, if the sea can do it so can you. Find some things and lay them in a roundness pattern. Add more or less and see how you like it. On still days leaves work really well but if there’s a gale blowing stick with the pebbles.
Gorgeous Circles

Self explanatory – it ain’t rocket science.
Night time

Well it’s all very well getting in your creative groove in the bright sunshiny days that we have so very many of in England, but once the clocks change its dark a tad earlier than you ever expect.

So you need some candles to light the way. Collect up a few jam jars – do wash them first or it all gets a bit sticky – and some leaves and either go the pva route (which, as we know takes a LONG time to dry) or grab some double sided tape and get sticking. If you’re really going for it you can add wire handles and hang from the trees but do check the branches haven’t caught fire before you go to bed, especially if it’s either Pimms or mulled wine time of year.
Leaf layering

‘Why?’ I hear you cry. ‘Why leaf layering, whatever is the point of that?’ and I would reply ‘Who said there has to be a point?’

Go on, just try it. Once you start you won’t be able to stop (and they don’t come in a tube and you won’t gain weight doing this activity)
Laminating Leaves

Oh it can be so relaxing and satisfying standing by a laminator gently pushing the pouch in and waiting for it to come out the other side. Of course there are those rare occasions when it doesn’t come out the other side and you can’t believe all of that has gone in THERE and stayed in there. But when it works, it’s just lovely.

The leaves don’t have to be perfect and remember leaves are green too AND you can even use reeds and grasses like in this one here ...
Faces

We all have them, don’t we? They’re a bit like leaves; all different colours and shapes. So grab yourself some twigs or leaves or stones – or stuff that you can find (nothing sharp though, leave that where it is) and get creating. If you’re at the beach and make a face from rubbish, how about picking it up on the way back and putting it in the bin?
Punching

No not THAT sort of punching, don’t be silly now. This only works if you already have some punches or you’ll have to go out and buy some which rather gets away from the keep it simple philosophy we have going on here. But if you HAPPEN to already have some punches then this is a FREE thing to do! Punch away and then you can stick them on things like the jam jar tea lights or laminate them or scatter them along paths to make people wonder who put them there.
Leaving treats

Sometimes if you leave a beautiful thing outside that is made of natural things that you have just found there it really brightens someone’s day. I was climbing up a hill in Ireland, maybe it was a mountain – it definitely FELT like a mountain –. It was foggy, it was cold, I couldn’t see more than ten feet in front of me, there were crosses all the way up so I was just looking out for the next one of those and to be honest, it was a struggle. I really didn’t want to go any further; at that point I wasn’t bothered about getting to the top it was too much like hard work. Then I saw this stone heart. Wow, it made such a difference, really cheered me up and kept me going. Amazingly when we got to the top the fog cleared and the views were stunning and that heart really spurred me on up there.

So go on, make something beautiful...
Putting it all together

Now it’s time to grab some of those ideas and mix them up a bit so add the punched shapes to your tea lights or wand, add some feathers to your staff, laminate feathers! Come on just get out there and play.

I began this project thinking I was going to write about ten things to do with a log round and ten things to do with a tyre but the leaves kind of took over and I went with the flow. And you know what, that’s ok. Go out and find your flow now, do it! Go on!

Links
Rounded & Grounded Blog (me!)  
http://roundedandgrounded.blogspot.co.uk/

Me on faceyb  

Learning for Life  
http://nosuchthingasbadweather.blogspot.co.uk/

Muddy Faces  
http://www.muddyfaces.co.uk/

Screw Work, Let’s Play  
http://www.screwworkletsplay.com/