

## Facts and Folklore

Ash trees are deciduous, and the emergence of ash and oak leaves is thought to be a predictor of the summer weather: 'Ash before oak you're in for a soak' (a summer of mixed weather) 'Oak before ash you're in for a splash' (drought).

Before steel production, ash was used extensively for boat and car chassis frames, tool handles and sports equipment such as snooker cues and tennis rackets.

These days ash is used for wood veneers and flooring.

There are about 50 different species of them in the whole world. Three of these species grow in Europe. In the UK, it is mainly the "common ash" that grows. Ashes form a genus and are related to olive trees.

Witches were reputed to use ash branches to help them fly.

Very young ash fruits, known as keys, can be boiled and pickled for a substitute to capers.

An evenly shaped ash leaf was thought to bring luck: 'The even ash leaf in my hand, the first I meet shall be my man'.

As a wood fuel it is thought to be best while still green but of little use when dry:  
"Burn ash-wood green, 'tis fire for a queen;  
burn ash-wood sear, 'twill make a man swear".

## Ash trees through the seasons

Watch the short video about a year in the life of an ash tree.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z0jdCENAXeQ>

Divide a plain drawing sheet into four equal parts. These four parts will symbolise the seasons.

Draw or paint each season what you think characterises ash in that period.

Add texture to the painting using fresh or dried ash leaves, keys, bark or other parts of the tree.

In autumn the European ash trees lose their leaves. In spring new ones grow. On other continents there are ash trees that keep their leaves over the winter. Ashes form flowers, from which the seeds then develop. They have a wing like the seeds of the maple tree. This allows the seeds to fly a little way from the trunk. This allows the tree to reproduce better.

Ash wood is very heavy, firm and elastic. It is therefore considered the best European wood for the handles of tools, i.e. hammers, shovels, picks, brooms and so on. But it is also suitable for sports equipment such as sledges or baseball bats, and for building ships. However, the wood does not like moisture so you should not leave these objects outside at night.





## Practical Uses

### Ash wood slice spinner

#### You'll need:

Slices of ash with a hole drilled in the middle, sticks, sharp knife or vegetable peeler, marker pens, glue

#### Instructions:

Using the pen, carefully draw a spiral starting from the centre of the ash slice and working outwards. Take a short length of stick and remove bark using the peeler (or knife, if using) and create a point at one end. Push the stick through the centre of the ash slice, adjusting the width of the stick using the peeler if necessary, or glue it into place.

You now have your finished Spinner.



### Fairy and elf houses

#### You'll need:

Sharp knife or vegetable peeler, chunks of ash wood in different lengths, pens or paints and brushes, glue, small sticks

#### Instructions:

Use a sharp knife to shape the roof of the elf and fairy houses.  
Paint the roof and stick on a small piece of wood as a chimney  
Use paint to design the windows and doors of the house

### Woodland animals

#### You'll need:

Sharp knife or vegetable peeler, pieces of ash wood in different lengths, pens or paints and brushes, glue, string

#### Instructions:

Cut a slice from the wood to create the face of the animal. Using a pen and or paint, add your creature's features such as face, spines for the hedgehog. Stick a short piece of string on the base as a tail and leave to dry. For the woodland foxes, use a sharp knife to whittle the shape and when finished add features with a pen.





## Practical uses

### Making a catapult

#### You'll need:

A Y shaped, forked piece of wood trimmed to a comfortable hand size, sharp knife or vegetable peeler, piece of elastic – or any thick, stretchy material that you have on hand can be converted to an effective firing mechanism, small piece of leather or thick material to make the 'firing' pouch, string or cotton thread or dental floss.

#### Instructions:

Find an appropriately shaped piece of wood in a V shape with a length below that can be a handle by cutting some wood off at a junction of branches. Using a sharp knife, remove the bark from the wood. Cut two notches on the top of each prong. Cut two matching sized length of elastic approximately the length of the frame and attach around the notch by winding it around the top, securing in place using thread, repeat on the other side. Cut the pouch material approximately 10cm x 5cm. Using a hole punch, make a hole at each end of the rectangle. Thread the end of elastic through one of the holes you have punched in the pouch. Knot it tightly to the outer edge, fastening it tightly with the thread. Repeat with the opposite hole. The catapult is now completed with the bands on either side and the pouch in the middle.

<https://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Sling-Shot>



### Den building

All children love making dens and it is a fun way to spend time outside interacting with plants and nature. There are no rules on how to make a den. Some tips would be to create two triangles or wigwam shapes and stretch a longer branch across the two. Next step would be to stretch branches across and when there is enough of a structure this can be covered with bracken or other things that can be found. A sturdy tree trunk with branches leaned against it can also be the start of a great natural shelter.



## Practical uses

### Picture frames

There are endless ideas for sticks. An easy and quick idea is to create a frame and use this to do your own woodland weaving.

#### Equipment:

Sticks, twine/ string, fabric strips, natural found objects

#### Instructions:

Firstly, create a frame, overlapping 4 sticks, use the string to attach the sticks into a square shape. Once you have done this attach strings in both directions to create the basic structure for weaving. Take time to collect natural objects in your area and then weave these and piece of the fabric through the strings in the frame. This work can be a bit fiddly but can add strength by weaving twigs in and out of the string and use the thread to attach leaves and other items in place.



### Boat building

#### Equipment:

Corks  
Pieces of wood / twigs  
Twine/ string  
Glue  
Sail materials- cloth, leaves, feathers.

#### Instructions:

The boats can be constructed in a variety of ways and children can experiment with a range of natural materials to find out which works best. Take the boats to the nearest local outdoor water to test them out – or make a giant puddle or temporary pond of your own.



### Make a star

#### Equipment:

Twigs, string, scissors or knife

#### Instructions:

This is a simple but effective project. Using short lengths of twigs create two triangles, attaching the ends together using string. Overlay one of the triangles with the other until you are happy with the star shape then fasten together using string.