

Playful springboards: GRASS

Facts and Folklore

Grasses make up the world's most significant food source as a grain source for both humans and animals. Available all year round, the play value of grasses is maximised in summer when they are in flower. The largest variety of grass is giant bamboo, which can grow up to 151 feet tall.

TRADITIONAL RHYME

Here's a tree in summer
(hold up seeds on grass stem)
Here's a tree in winter
(remove seeds with an upwards sweep of the hand and show the left over stalk of grass)
Here's a bunch of flowers
(pinch the seeds in a bunch)
And here's the April showers
(throw them in the air)

a rhyme children used as they stripped the grass seeds off the stalk, ready to throw over their friend.

Papyrus (sometimes thought of as a weed) is from the sedge family, a related family to grasses, that grew along the banks of the Nile River. It grew around 3m high and was used to make many essential items. Ancient Egyptians used it to make paper, baskets, sandals, mats, rope, blankets, tables, chairs, mattresses, medicine, perfume, food, and clothes.

Equipment:

Hay or other dry fibrous material - old wool jumpers or even a sleeping bag will work; large wooden box with tight fitting lid; cast iron lidded pan; dinner (e.g. stew); source of heat – stove or fire.

Do not cook rice this way!

Instructions:

Line the bottom and sides of the box with hay. Start the recipe in the cast iron pan, on the heat source, for 10-15 minutes to bring to the boil. Place the pan on top of the dry hay and fill the remainder of the box with hay. Close the box lid and leave for the day. Bring the slow cooked stew back to the boil on the heat source and serve.

Recipes

HAYBOX COOKING:

Slow cooking using hay, a DIY thermal cooker.

This is a fun cooking experiment, perfect for outdoor adventures. It is a very economical way to cook food as it relies on so little fuel, and slow cooks during the day ready for a hearty evening meal. It can be useful as a means to cook porridge overnight, if you heat up the porridge on the last embers of the evening's fire, then place it in the hay box overnight.

Recipes

HEDGEHOG BREAD ROLLS

Grains from grass such as rice, maize and millets are the source for flours used in bread making and other food stuffs.

Sugar Cane brings sugar and molasses's to so many recipes and drinks. Wheat seeds can be ground with a small hand mill by the children. The flour made this way can be used for baking a smaller bread or loaves.

Reference: <https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/hedgehog-rolls>

Ingredients:

500 g brown Bread making kit, raisins, flaked almonds, scissors

Instructions:

Follow the recipe to make the bread. Form the dough into a round and shape the snout, leave to rise. Before putting the hedgehog in the oven, use scissors to cut the spikes in to the dough, add two eyes and a flaked almond nose.

Bake in the oven following instructions on the bread mix packet.

Some foods can be cooked or smoked with clean, dried and hygienically stored hay. It is said to give an earthy, smoky flavour to meats and vegetables.



CORN DOLLIES

Once a popular pastime during harvest, dolls, knots and other creations were made from left over corn.

Equipment:

Collect long stems of left-over wheat, or use other grasses and leaves; string or raffia; scissors

Instructions:

Fold a bundle of stems together and twist the top to make a 'head' - tie some raffia round the 'neck' and another piece around the 'waist'. Divide and twist the bottom of the bundle to create two legs. Create a smaller bundle of stems for the arms and attach them across the middle of the dolly.

Weave or tie natural objects in to make hair, clothes and decorations for the dolly.

LEMONGRASS CANDLES

Citronella and lemongrass have such an amazing scent and can be used for candle or torch projects to keep insects – particularly mosquitos – away.

Equipment:

Glass jars or tumblers; citronella or lemongrass essential oil; wax chips or candle stubs; Metal wick plates (or glue the wick to the bottom of the jar); balloons; saucepan; stirrer; pencils to hold up wicks as wax dries.

Instructions:

Glue the wick to the base of the jar, or use the metal wick holder. Wrap the top of the wick around a pencil and balance on top of the jar to hold the wick upright. Melt the wax in a heatproof bowl of water over a saucepan. Once the wax has melted add drops of essential oil. Leave to cool a little. Pour into to the prepared jars. Leave to cool completely. Remove the wick from the pencil once dried and trim the length of wick. Decorate your jars with tissue paper, acrylic paints or natural materials.

Practical uses

Practical uses

CANE DEN

This practical activity gives an opportunity for collaboration. The den is easy to make and the completed framework is lightweight but relatively stable. The den can be built and used indoors or out.

Equipment:

25 bamboo garden canes; 50 large paperclips; string and pegs; electrical or masking tape; items to cover the frame: fabrics, parachute, flower garlands, large black bin liners, fairy lights, balloons, cushions, leaves, twigs, natural materials.

Instructions:

Pick a cane size to suit the space and children's height, e.g. 1.2m canes for young children, or 2.4m for a den tall enough for adults to stand up inside. You will need 4 or 5 people to make the frame.

Prepare the canes: tape a paper clip to each end of each cane with the electrical or masking tape so that it creates loops.

Make 5 flat cane triangles by tying the corner loops together using the string.

Lay the 5 triangles out on the floor, corner to corner, so that the space in the middle makes a pentagon.

Tie the inner touching corners together using the loops. Take 5 more canes. Hold the triangles upright by their tips, so they are leaning out slightly from the base. Connect the top of each triangle to one of the new canes, until all the tips have a cane between them. The structure will now be free-standing – just! Tie all 5 remaining canes together at one end. Stand in the middle of the structure, holding the tied end of the 5 canes uppermost. Open the canes like an umbrella and tie the free ends of the canes to the tips of the triangles.

The structure is now complete and free-standing. It is sturdy, but not strong enough to climb or swing on. Decorate the den with whatever is to hand. Experiment with different materials for making spaces that are, for example, relaxing (cushions, fabrics), dark (black bin liners), etc.

This activity is adapted from the Play Way trainer notebook, developed as part of the EU-funded VIPER project (University of Gloucestershire), first published in 2012 and devised by PACT Birmingham / Play Resource Co.



Games



FIRING PLANTAIN

Equipment:

Collect some plantain leaves.
Ribwort plantain, *Plantago lanceolata* is a very common plant in fields, roadsides and gardens. It is quite distinctive.

Instructions:

Pick a long stalk - tough-stemmed ones work best. Hold with the flower pointing away from you, then bring the base end of the stalk around and fold it in a loop just below the flower.

Grasp the stalks firmly in both hands and pull the loop upwards to the neck of the flower. The stalks are slightly elastic; hopefully, the stalk will snap just below the flower and it will be catapulted forward up to a dozen feet.

TASSELS AND TOKENS

Bundles of grasses, tied at one end and with the addition of feathers and other natural objects, have traditionally been used in many creative and spiritual outdoor projects:

Magic amulets and charms to hang outdoors

Make a team standard, by driving a big stick into the ground and asking the team to decorate it with charms

Make crowns or hats

Weave or plait long green grasses into ribbons

Search online for projects that use grasses for weaving or larger construction projects with the use of bamboo or canes. <http://colorful-crafts.com/how-to-weave-a-simple-grass-basket/>



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GRASS MOWING PLAY SPACES

Any grassy space can be mowed in many ways – for example in a spiral shape to create variety and invitations to play. This technique can be used for jumping games (e.g. hopscotch) as well as zoning the play space. Make the most of mowing (for non-allergenic children) and have lots of fun having grass battles or simply crawling through the long grass, or walking barefoot on grass.

GRASS BLOWING

Equipment:

Pick a flat blade of grass that's as long as your thumbs. You'll get more sound from wide, slightly coarse grass than from thin, fine grass.

Instructions:

Place a piece of grass between your thumbs and press your thumbs together at both the knuckles. Your fingernails facing towards you. The grass should be really taut between the two thumbs and you should be able to see the blade of the grass in the middle of the gap between your thumbs and your knuckles. Place your lips to your thumbs where the gap is and blow. You may need to practice getting a sound from the grass by slightly moving your lips up or down until you get the right adjustment. Try the same effect with a number of different grasses and work out which one works best.

Games

BULL RUSH IN THE MUD

You will need two teams. One team is the Chasers and one is the Runners. The ratio varies according to the size of the playing field and the running speed of the Chasers, but try one Chaser per eight Runners. Chasers and Runners all start at one end of the designated area. The chasers stand in the middle of the field and one Chaser, the leader calls out "Bull Rush!" When the Chaser leader calls out "Bull Rush!" their end of the field becomes "unsafe" and all of the Runners must try to run to the other "safe" end of the field. The Chasers must try to tag as many as possible as they run past. Any player who doesn't run is also able to be tagged because that end of the field is now "unsafe".

All Runners who have been tagged must stand exactly where they were tagged. They should stand with their legs apart but otherwise are not allowed to move from the middle of the field. Runner players may free their fellow Runners by crawling between their legs. If they're tagged by a Chaser while crawling then they don't freeze between their partner's legs but freeze beside them. The game ends if and when all Runner players have been frozen, or all Runners are in the 'safe space'. The winner of the game is then the player who was last to be tagged.

