

Playful springboards: CONIFERS



Facts and Folklore

In the past, druids would use Scots pine during the winter solstice to draw back the Sun by building and burning large bonfires. It was also traditional to decorate the trees with shiny objects and light. This may have been the beginning of the tradition of Christmas trees and yule logs.

Pine trees were often used for shipbuilding due to the properties of having high resin in the wood. There was a superstition that said that Pine trees should not be felled if they were to be used for shipbuilding during the waning of the moon. It was felt that the tidal influence of the moon would affect the resin content of the wood. Even today loggers pay attention to the moon.

CAUTION

There are some species of pine tree that produce pine nuts. These can be purchased in shops and are used in baking and cooking, for example pine nuts are a key ingredient in pesto served with pasta.

It is not advisable to collect and eat pine nuts as not all of them are edible.

Some are mildly toxic and cause tingling metallic taste in the mouth when eaten.

Conifers are trees that produce their seeds through cones. The cones are quite easily spotted and help to identify the tree as a conifer. Most of the conifer trees are evergreen however, there are a few such as the larch that are deciduous.

The conifer's needles are in fact its leaves. Conifers drop their cones in autumn and foraging for pinecones and other cones is easy.

In the UK, two species of native conifer tree produce cones: Scots pine and common juniper.

There are 10 yew trees in Britain that are said to pre-date the 10th Century.

CAUTION

It is possible to make a tea from pine needles, for example in Sweden, people use green pine needles as tea and call it tallstrunt. However, not all pine needles can be used so great care is required particularly as all parts of the yew tree are poisonous and can kill humans if eaten. Even sleeping beneath a yew tree has been said to be dangerous. Pine is more reputed for its smell and the fun to be had with pine cones as below.

Recipes

Practical Uses

The most popular use of pines is to make decorations from pinecones, and this extends to a wide variety of fun craft ideas. As a wonderful free resource that can be collected from the ground in the autumn, pinecones can be the starting point for a great number of projects.

PINE CONE WREATH

Equipment:

Pinecones, glass vase, paint, glitter, ribbons
wire coat hanger or wreath made from willow,
thin flexible wire, scissors

Instructions:

Shop-bought wreaths often include pinecones, but they are very easy to make. Have a willow circle (see the Willow Playful Springboards for instructions) or use wire such as an old coat hanger. Attach thin wire to your pinecones and wrap them around the wreath.

Leave the cones natural, or paint them / add glitter to them before you wire them onto the wreath. Once the circle is covered with pinecones, it is now ready to add a ribbon and attach to your door.

PINE CONE ANIMALS

Equipment:

Pinecones, felt, scissors, glue, thin wire,
Playdough, stick on googly eyes, cotton
wool, pipe cleaners

Instructions:

Taking inspiration from the pictures, or using your own imagination, use the basic pinecone for the body of the animal or insect. Add the other features using a range of craft materials such as felt to create eyes or wings that can be glued in place, using pipe cleaners for legs and have fun creating!



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Onelittleproject.com



Practical Ideas: Pinecone bird feeder

Equipment:

Pinecones
Fat (such as lard)
Bird seed
String

Instructions:

Attach the string to the top of the pinecone, knotting it in place. Melt the fat in a pan and once it has turned to liquid add the bird seed. Leave to cool until starting to reset. Pour and press the fat and seed mixture into the pinecone. Leave the cones to dry on greaseproof paper. Once dried, hang the seeds for the birds to enjoy!



Somethingturquoise.com

Practical Uses

PINECONE FIRE STARTERS

Equipment:

Dry pinecones
Wax (e.g. candle or crayon stubs, paraffin, or beeswax)
A double boiler / Bain Marie
Tongs
Foil or wax paper
Essential oil (optional)
Crayons to add colour (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS:

Melt the wax in a double boiler; if you do not have a double boiler, place some water in the bottom of a high sided saucepan and place a heat proof bowl (metal or glass) on top. The bowl should not touch the water while the wax is melting. Add the crayon pieces and essential oils if using, to the wax – do not leave it unattended. Using tongs, taking care as the wax will be very hot, dip the pinecone into the wax ensure thorough coverage. Hold the cone over the bowl until it stops dripping and then place it on a piece of foil or wax paper to dry.

Once dry, the cones are ready to use. They can be added to the fire with some kindling and then lit.

Practical Uses

TABLE CENTRE PIECES

Equipment:

Pine cones, glass vase, paint, glitter, ribbons

Instructions:

For an easy decoration, collect some pine cones and decorate them with paint and or glitter. Present these pine cones in a clear vase in the middle of your table.

PINECONE TORCH

Equipment:

Pinecones, pine resin (found in trees where a branch has been damaged; scrape into a container), axe/ pen knife, 'green' / living stick for the torch handle

Instructions:

Melt the resin until runny and carefully dip the pinecone in until it is completely covered with resin. Using the axe or knife, split one end of the green stick into a cross and bend back 4 'arms' and firmly push the pinecone in to the four arms at the end of the handle. Place the other end of the stick into the ground. Light the torch. If carrying the torch, hold it tilted away as hot, melting resin will drip!

MEET THE TREE

Equipment:

Blindfolds, a small grove of trees

Instructions:

Choose an area with plenty of trees but few other ground cover hazards. In pairs, one player is blindfolded, the other acts as guide. The guide disorientates their partner by rotating them a few times and walking them around the area, carefully leading them by the arm towards a tree to 'meet' it. Once there they can touch and smell the tree to get to know it; feeling for and making a mental note of the lumps, bumps and branches. They are then disorientated again and guided back to a central point between a group of trees that includes their tree, where they remove the blindfold. The player who was blindfolded then tries to find the tree that they met. The players then swap roles.

PINECONE TARGET

Equipment:

Pinecones, three concentric circles for a target, drawn on the ground with a stick or chalk.

Instructions:

Each player needs three pinecones and stands a set distance away from the target circles. Aim the pinecones into the circle. The smallest circle is worth the most points - or ask children to 'collect' a set number of points by aiming for specific circles (e.g. 14 points from 2, 5 and 7 points).

Games