

FUN AND FROLICS WITH NATURE



GROWING THE FUTURE
TYFU'R DYFODOL

Photo: Dr Natasha de Vere

Hello! My name is Rebecca Thomas. I am usually very busy at this time of year creating, preparing and delivering activities that inspire children and adults to engage with nature whilst having fun, at the National Botanic Garden of Wales. While the Botanic Garden is closed, and most of you will be confined to your home, I have put together some more activity ideas to keep everyone busy and interested in the natural world around us.

This set of activities originated from a walk that I took with the children, I had intended it to be a calm, quiet and relaxed walk however at the sight of the plants in full bloom it turned into a noisy boisterous walk full of fun and frolics.

As a child, my father taught me most of these games, he was a shepherd on a large farm and I would follow him around the fields checking the sheep. Now as a mother I have taught my children these games and instinctively they will search for the plants and are delighted when they find them to play the games each year.

Games are important to children, all of these little activities encourage children to learn to recognise the plants, know their names and look out for them. The knowledge that the children have obtained whilst playing will stay with them into adulthood and continue to be taught to future generations of children.

Let's have fun together!

WHISTLING GRASS

Every springtime after the daffodils have died off the grass starts to grow on the verges:

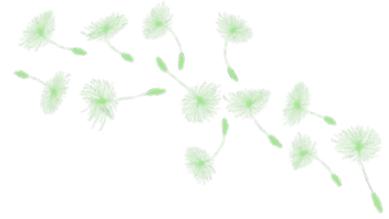
- Find a straight fresh piece of grass
- Cup your hands together with your thumbs lined up and the blade of grass sandwiched between them
- Your thumbs should touch at the top and bottom, leaving an opening in the middle
- Blow and whistle! Blow through the opening. When the grass vibrates, it will make a screeching sound



DANDELION CLOCKS

Dandelions flower from the Spring through to the Autumn, however the flowers and seed heads are most abundant during May and June. Dandelions have a nickname that makes children laugh 'wet the bed'. This is because medicinally they are used as a diuretic.

- Carefully pick a dandelion
- Stand with your back to the wind
- Blow the dandelion until all the seeds have blown off
- Each blow is an hour of the clock
- One o'clock, two o'clock etc.



PLANTAIN SWORDS AND POP GUNS

Ribwort Plantain is a widespread plant that grows in lawns, parks, tracks and roadside verges. It flowers between April and October it is used medicinally as an antihistamine (good for nettle stings).

Plantain Pop Guns

- Pick a long stalk - tough-stemmed ones work best
- Hold the stalk 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, give it a squeeze
- Grasp the stalks firmly in both hands and pull the loop upwards to the neck of the pointed head
- The stalks are slightly elastic; hopefully (not always), the stalk will snap just below the flower and it will be catapulted forward up to 1 meter

Plantain Swords

This is slightly easier than pop guns but just as fun, it is a bit like conkers.

- Two people find a thick piece of plantain
- Take it in turns
- Player one holds the plantain out straight
- Player two strikes the plantain to decapitate the seed head

Keep taking turns until one wins, that is now a 'one r' as with conkers



DAISY CHAINS

Perhaps one of our most familiar flowers of all, the humble Common Daisy can be seen flowering almost all year-round in lawns.

- To make a daisy chain collect enough daisies for the chain, leave the rest for the insects
- Using your thumbnail, carve a small slit into the thickest part of the stem of the daisy (about 1cm in length)
- Once you have created a hole, take another daisy from your collection and pull the stem through the hole of the original daisy. This is the beginning of your daisy chain!
- Repeat this step as many times as you like until you have your desired length of daisy chain
- To finish off the chain you just need to connect the first daisy to the last daisy. To do so, you must make a slit in the last daisy on the chain. Then you just take hold of the daisy at the other end and pull it through



GOOSE GRASS - STICKY-BACKS

Goose Grass or Cleavers are a common long hairy plant growing in hedgerows, roadsides, woodland and gardens.

It re-grows in the springtime and dies down again in the winter. It has been a long-standing enemy of the allotment owner, as their 'sticky' seeds easily propagate and become a sprawling nuisance in beds and borders.

The tender young shoot tips have a mild flavour used in soups and stews. It is also medicinally used as a tea, as it is a diuretic.

- Goose grass is also perfect for children to find down in the grass or hedgerow
- Pull the goose grass up
- Carefully place it on a fellow walker's back
- See how long it takes the person to notice

Note: Occasionally, some people can develop a skin rash from the contact of cleavers.

DO YOU LIKE BUTTER?

Buttercups flower between May and October, they are found throughout the UK growing in parks, gardens, meadows, pastures and damp, grassy places.

- The buttercup has beautiful shiny translucent petals that attract the bees and insects to them in order to pollinate the flower. [Find out more](#) on the the best plants for pollinators to look out for in the spring, based on the research carried out by the National Botanic Garden of Wales' Science Team
- For generations children have held up the buttercup to the chin to ask the question “do you like butter?”
- The yellow shiny petals reflect golden yellow onto the skin in the sunshine

Note: Buttercups are **not edible they are poisonous to humans and cattle** which is why they are left in fields uneaten.



SUMMER TREES WINTER TREES

Throughout the summer along the grass verges and at the edge of parks and lawns different types of meadow grasses seed.

These seeds are perfect for an old rhyme to tell the seasons:

- Summer trees - Pick a tall grass seed head and hold it up
- Winter Trees – Strip the seeds from the stalk using finger and thumb from base to top
- Bunch of flowers – hold the seeds as a bunch of flowers in the tips of the fingers
- April showers – throw the grass in the air or over somebody

Note: Be aware of children with hay fever as the grass contains pollen.

Conservation: Most of these games aid in the distribution of seeds. When picking daisies and buttercups only pick enough for the activity and leave the rest for the insects.

Footnote: Sometimes these games can become very frustrating to the parent or adult who is wanting a quiet walk. They find that they are covered in dandelion seeds, goose grass is stuck on clothes, plantain head ammunition is shot from all angles, the peace and tranquillity of the bird song is disturbed by a constant screech from the grass whistle.

A large cup of camomile tea in a quiet corner is prescribed to all parents/adults after returning from this walk. Secure in the knowledge that the children have enjoyed themselves, engaged with the environment, have become familiar with different plants, have run off some steam and had fun and frolics with nature.

If you have enjoyed these games, please post or send pictures. If you have any other suggestions for games or fun and frolics in nature, please do share with us **@GTFCymru**.

GROWING THE FUTURE

The Growing the Future project at the National Botanic Garden of Wales is a five-year project to champion Welsh horticulture, plants for pollinators, the protection of wildlife and the virtues of growing plants for food, fun, health and well-being.

Whether you are a seasoned gardener, a fledgling grower or a budding beekeeper – we want to help provide training, information and support to you. For more information on the project's events and courses, please call **01558 667150**, email **gtf@gardenofwales.org.uk** or visit **botanicgarden.wales/science/growing-the-future**.

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