

## Working In Tandem With The Seasons

Paddy Madden continues with the series on SESE tips for throughout the year

## October

## INDOOR



Hedgerow in a box

**1 Construct a native hedgerow** This is an ideal month for studying the *shrub layer* of a native hedgerow or woodland edge because of the abundance of fruit and seed found there. Find a cardboard box c. 35cm x 44cm x 29cm. Make a diagonal cut on both sides. Make another cut across the base of the front and discard all 3 off cuts. Paint the whole box green. Place plastic on the bottom as a moisture deterrent.

To make the *ground layer* place moss, rotting wood and leaves, cones and nuts on the plastic.

There will be no flowers in the *field layer* at this time of year but the tops of ferns can be inserted into flower oases to create this layer.

Make the *shrub layer* by inserting twigs with berries into oases or glass jars/small bottles. Suitable ones at this time of year are elder (elderberries), whitethorn (haws), blackthorn (sloes), wild rose (hips).

Create the *tree layer* by placing tree twigs into oases or glass bottles/jars. Disguise the oases and jars with ivy and moss. Place toy insects, minibeasts and mammals such as hedgehogs and mice on the ground layer for effect.

**2 Sow an acorn or horse chestnut in a used milk carton** See [www.blackrockec.ie](http://www.blackrockec.ie) for instructions on how to do this activity. Test acorns and chestnuts first for viability by placing them in a basin of water. If they sink

they're viable; if they float they won't germinate.

**3 Keep woodlice in the classroom** Woodlice are fascinating creatures to study. These crustaceans have been living on dry land for 50 million years having originated in the sea. They have retained their gills for breathing. The females carry their young around in a brood pouch. They are useful scavengers, eating rotting leaves and withered plants. They are eaten by spiders, centipedes, pigmy shrews, beetles and owls. See [www.blackrockec.ie](http://www.blackrockec.ie) for information on how to set up a woodlouse habitat in the classroom.

**4 Study the migration of geese, salmon and eels** Check [www.rte.ie/tv/wildjournies](http://www.rte.ie/tv/wildjournies) for useful information on the migration routes of Brent and Barnacle Geese, wild salmon and European eels. Also [www.somethingfishy.ie](http://www.somethingfishy.ie) has excellent material on the salmon.

**5 Construct a box for hibernating ladybirds** At this time of the year aphids become scarcer as the weather gets colder. Ladybirds now must hibernate for the winter. Find c.170cm of untreated wood such as 17x4cm off cuts and make an open-fronted box from same using 15 60mmx5mm screws. Fill with c.180 scooped-out elder twigs or bamboos about 11cm long and 2 cm in diameter. Hang off a tree in a sunny part of the garden for ladybirds to use over the winter.

**6 Study seed dispersal** This is a good time to study wind and animal dispersal of seeds. **Wind dispersed seeds:** ash, sycamore, maple, silver birch. **Animal dispersed seeds:** rowan, blackberry, sloe, hawthorn, elderberry, oak, yew, crab apple, holly and hazel. See [www.treecouncilofireland.ie](http://www.treecouncilofireland.ie) and [www.schoolnet.com](http://www.schoolnet.com).

**Strand Units covered this month: Environmental awareness, caring for the environment, science and the environment, plant and animal life.**

**Acknowledgements, September and October** Daffodil maze: Great Gardens for Kids by Clare Matthews, Bounty Books, London, 2005. Ladybird hibernation box from [www.conservationsservices.ie](http://www.conservationsservices.ie). Glass dishes for growing daffodils in the classroom can be ordered from [www.recycleit.ie](http://www.recycleit.ie). They are salvaged from washing machines and tumble dryers.



Ladybird hibernation box in St Mary's NS, Blessington



Autumn fruits



## OUTDOOR

**1 Go on a minibeast hunt** Bring the class on a nature walk around the school for about 30 minutes to observe trees, shrubs, fruits and seeds. Then divide the class into 5 or 6 groups and give each group a task sheet and a bucket containing an old paint brush, dessert spoon and magnifier. Give them about 25 minutes to collect all items on the sheet plus 2 minibeasts. Items for collection could include an old oak



Berries of Guelder Rose



Beech leaf and nuts which contain mast

leaf, a feather, a husk of a beech nut, a leaf with signs that it was eaten by an insect, a red berry, a leaf with 2 colours. After the hunt assemble them all together and examine and compare what was found before they return everything to where they were collected. An imaginative way to close the session is to say to the children: "The fairies may come into the wood tonight. Wouldn't it be nice to build a little house for them? Divide up into 5 groups and decide what you can build together." 🧚



Fairyhouse made by children in Halverstown NS, Kilcullen, Co Kildare

### Marino Autumn Nature Hunt

#### Can you find?

1. A bird's feather.

2. A pine cone eaten by a squirrel.

3. A green oak leaf.

4. An old oak leaf.

5. An old leaf eaten by a creature.

6. A pine cone not eaten by a squirrel.

7. A chestnut case.

Activity: Make a house for the fairies using twigs, leaves, bark, moss, nuts etc.

8. A large chestnut.

9. A piece of bark. Find it on the ground.

10. Two mini-beasts.

Well done!  
An-mhaith!  
You are a super sleuth!



**PADDY MADDEN** lectures in SESE in Coláiste Mhuire, Marino Institute of Education. The monthly articles, 'Working in tandem with the seasons', are based on the very successful course of the same name which was pioneered in Marino in 2009. This year the course will take place in the Blackrock Education Centre on one Monday every month from September to June commencing on the 27 September. Enquiries to Catherine@blackrockec.ie. The Centre will also produce 5 short videos every month based on the monthly sessions. They can be downloaded from [www.blackrockec.ie](http://www.blackrockec.ie)