



Working In Tandem With The Seasons

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

May

OUTDOOR

1 Sow salad vegetables for a salad party in June: Sow a few seeds or plants such as rocket, endives, lettuce and spring onion now. In June the children wash the leaves and make up salad sandwiches by putting them between slices of bread.

2 Sow a small wildflower meadow: A wildflower meadow will attract birds and bees and will also provide cover for frogs. The brown butterflies lay eggs on tall grasses so this will be a valuable habitat for them. Sow Irish wildflowers and grasses in a sunny area. Seeds can be purchased from www.wildflowers.ie and www.irishtimes.com/shop/ See www.blackrockec.ie for details on how to sow.



Meadow

3 Make a nectar patch for butterflies: Construct a bed against a

sunny wall. Fill it with good soil and add in plenty of organic matter. In the front plant low growing nectar plants such as Arabis, Aubretia and Marjoram. In the middle plant middle-sized



Nectar patch, Kill Village, Co Kildare

plants such as Sedum, Phlox and Michaelmas Daisies. At the back plant tall plants such as Dwarf Buddleia and Verbena bonariensis. The only shrub here is the Buddleia. The rest are perennials and should be planted in groups of 3 or 5. See www.blackrockec.ie

4 Bring the children for a walk in the woods: This is the best month for exploring a wood. Here is a diary extract of a morning in Moore Abbey Wood, Monasterevan, Co Kildare, with children from Twomilehouse NS: "Got them to rub the rough elm leaves on their cheeks. They did rubbings of same on their notebooks. Also stuck them on with little strips cut from envelope labels. Before leaving the elm they collected the winged seeds and had a competition to see who could blow them the farthest. Children fascinated with Lords and Ladies plant. Amazed to discover that it emits a stink smell to attract flies as pollinators: they think it contains rotting meat, which would be ideal for their eggs and subsequent larvae. Examined sycamore leaves. Got them to place their hands on leaves and compare the two. Examined the flexible hazel. Got them to make the letter 'O' out of stem. Extended this activity by getting them to make shapes of their own – triangles, ovals, raindrops etc. They examined ferns and sketched them while I told them about dinosaurs and ferns. Next they stuck ash, beech and small sycamore leaves on their notebooks. They then looked at the beech trunk and compared it to an elephant's leg. They then listened to the sounds of the wood with eyes closed. Turning around they smelled the bluebells from different directions. Before they left they made houses for the fairies from moss, twigs, leaves, stones, bits of wood etc." 🌿



Potatoes growing in St Mary's SNS, Blessington



Moore Abbey bluebell wood



INDOOR

1 Make a snailery in the classroom: Children are fascinated with snails. To observe them in the classroom you need a clear five litre water bottle with the top part removed, chippings, damp soil, bits of slate, some chalk, moss, a weed or two, a couple of snails and a J cloth tied with an elastic band. Make drainage holes in the bottom with a nail scissors and place some chippings on the base. Cover these with 2.5 cm of damp soil. Place some moss on this and plant a weed or two for effect. Put in some bits of slate resting on little stones for the snails to hide under. A piece of chalk or cuttlefish bone will supply the snails' intake of calcium. Place two bottle lids on the moss, one filled with oatmeal and the other with



Snailery

water. After putting in the 2 or 3 snails tie a J cloth around the top with an elastic band. To get them active during the day spray them with water and rub some banana around the inside of the container. See 'Paddy's School Garden' on www.blackrockec.ie. Also see the Power-Point of Sammy Snail on www.discoverscience.ie.

1 Continue keeping records: See www.birdwatchireland.ie, www.ispynature.com, www.phenology.biodiversityireland.ie, www.greenwave.ie.

1 Make a bottle garden: This is a good resource for teaching about the rainforest and also about evaporation



Bottle Garden

and condensation. Most garden centres keep a supply of plants such as snakeskin plants which love the warm, humid conditions of a bottle garden. See www.blackrockec.ie for two sources of information: 'Paddy's School Garden' video and also step by step instructions on 'Make and Do Environmental Projects'.



Pelargoniums for plant sale

1 Take softwood cuttings: Propagating plants in May and June from the soft new growth on shrubs and perennials is a good way of increasing stock and also raising funds for the school garden in the autumn. Another good idea for fundraising is to buy pelargoniums ('Geraniums') when they are tiny and bring them on in the classrooms to sell in late June.

1 Sow pumpkin seeds in yoghurt containers or biodegradable pots made from newspaper: Place the seed on its side in the pot about 2.5 cm deep. Plant outside in early June in a bed with plenty of organic matter. See www.raringtogrow.com

Strand Units covered this month: environmental awareness, caring for the environment, plant and animal life



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 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. Click on 'Paddy's School Garden'.