



Working In Tandem With The Seasons

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



Biodegradable pots



Great bud race



March



Lesser Celandine

Strand Units covered this month: Strand units covered this month: environmental awareness, caring for the environment, science and the environment, plant and animal life, light, properties and characteristics of materials, rocks and soil, eras of change and conflict



INDOOR

1 Make biodegradable pots for sowing seeds indoors: It is very easy to make a supply of biodegradable pots from newspaper. Get the children to work in pairs at this activity. Divide a tabloid-size newspaper into 3 sections. Cut the sections with a scissors. You will end up with strips about 37cm x 10cm. One child holds a 500ml plastic bottle; another child wraps 5 overlapping strips around the end of the bottle leaving c. 5cm protruding over the end. Fold the protruding end inwards and seal the side and base with masking tape. See www.blackrockec.ie. Click on 'Paddy's School Garden' for video clip.

2 Continue keeping records: See www.birdwatchireland.ie, www.ispy-nature.com, www.phenology.biodiversityireland.ie, www.greenwave.ie.

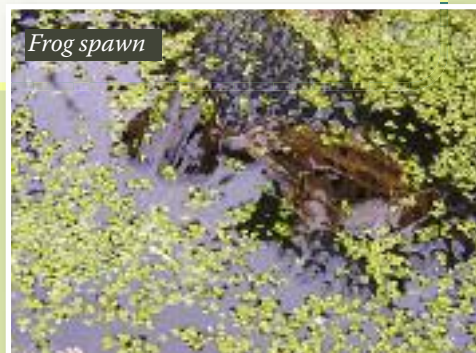
3 Sow munge tout and early peas in biodegradable pots: It's a good idea to sprout the peas first in pieces of damp, folded paper towels which have been placed in sealed transparent lunch bags. Put the towels in a warm, dark place for a couple of days to sprout.

4 Sow carrot seeds in old gutter pipes: Seal the ends of the pipes with duct tape. Leave a tiny space at one end for drainage. Tilt the pipe at a slight angle on a brick. Place a dish under the end with the slight opening to collect excess water. Fill with soil and water before sowing the carrots thinly. When ready, sow them outside by sliding the soil onto a raised bed. NB It's important to sow the carrots outside before the roots hit the pipe. If they do so they will warp.

5 Sow sunflowers in biodegradable pots: Sow sunflowers indoors in biodegradable pots. For all indoor growing use light boxes to ensure even growth. Harden off plants outside when they are c. 2.5cm high. Bring them indoors in the evening.

6 Have a great bud race: Cut growing twigs c. 20cm long from a selection of trees or roadside hedges. Place these in 200ml of water in different jars. Label with tree name and date. Get the children to predict which one will open first. See www.irishtimes.com/timeseye/trees/pdf/classroom.pdf

7 Study the life cycle of the frog in the classroom



OUTDOOR

1 Plant early potatoes around 17 March or when the sprouts are c. 2.5cm high: Prepare the raised bed by digging in lots of organic matter such as well-rotted manure or school compost. Using a string and two pegs make a straight line on one side of the bed about 15cm from edge. Dig holes 15cm deep and 30cm apart. Make another straight line with the string and pegs 45cm from where the first line was. Again dig holes 15cm deep and 30cm apart. Sprinkle some organic fertilizer in each hole. Plant one seed potato seed in each hole with the sprouting ends facing upwards. Cover the holes with soil. When they have grown c. 7cm add a layer of soil to each one leaving the tips showing. This is called "earthing up". Start feeding them at this stage with a high potash/low nitrogen soluble plant food. Keep the soil damp but don't overwater. Water little and often. Keep adding soil as they grow until each potato stalk will have a mound at least 15cm over it. They should be ready for eating in 9 to 10 weeks.

2 Conduct a fair test on potato yield using potato bags: Get 4 bags. These are usually 45cm high and 35cm

wide. Bag 1 will be the control and will only contain soil. Bag 2 will contain half soil and half school compost. Bag 3 will contain half soil and half well-rotted manure. Bag 4 will contain half soil and half multipurpose compost. Pour 10cm of the growing medium into each bag. Place 3 sprouted tubers in each bag with eyes facing upwards. Cover with 5cm of compost. Keep the compost slightly damp but do not overwater. When the shoots have grown 7cm add another layer of growing medium, leaving the tips showing. Repeat this process until the growing medium is 2.5cm from the top. When the planters become filled with compost and the leaves are showing feed each bag with a high potash/low nitrogen plant food.

3 Sow onion sets: Sow the sets 10cm apart with the same distance between rows. Don't push them into the soil. Use a trowel to make small holes for the sets.

4 Study the Great Famine: www.scoilnet.ie, www.askaboutireland.ie, www.irishpotatofamine.org.

5 Plant a native hedgerow: See www.blackrockec.ie



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. 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.