Autumnal Play and Learning

Encouraging children to notice seasonal change throughout the year is something we value at Hambledon Nursery School and happens very naturally as the children spend time outside as part of their daily routine.

We have developed two new exciting learning zones within our outside spaces. A wonderful fairy garden and raised gardening and digging bed and a new car track and tunnel area.

The children have been enjoying accessing the dynamic new spaces. The raised bed area is being used to dig in, using gardening tools to happily fill plant pots with soil. The children are interacting with the new fairy garden too, inspiring them to use their imaginations as they create stories based around the small world items found there. There are herbs growing too, including lavender, mint and rosemary and the children use all their senses as they play and examine the natural collection of items that have been provided, the shells, leaves and pinecones.

The nursery has also developed a new and ingenious car track area. Utilising the previously overgrown bottom corner of the garden. Gone are the nettles and brambles, this naturally uneven area has been used to best effect in creating the perfect incline for rolling cars through tubes and tunnels and moving them along tracks and roadways. This new enquriy based station is proving popular and the children are learning about movement, friction and forces and developing their cordination as they negotiate different surfaces and obstacles.

Autumn offers so many exciting opportunities for outdoor learning; it is a wonderful time of year to really use nature to promote the development of children. Whilst this may seem like an odd statement to make as the wet and dreary weather kicks in, the days grow shorter and everything seems somewhat muddier and duller, it doesn't take away from the wealth of learning that appears at this time of the year.

Leaves changing colour and falling off the trees, are of course the most noticeable change. This may be the first spark of interest in children discovering and understanding more about the world around them. We focussed on the theme of hibernation this year and which animals can be found in the wild, looking for a place to sleep through the colder months of the year. We learned that toads would find a log pile, hedgehogs will seek a nest of dry leaves, a dormouse will make a next of dry grass, a bat will find a cave and queen bees will make a hole in the soil. The children created pieces of artwork to show what they had learned, and we created a new display for the classroom.

Leaves have so many incredible benefits. From mathematics and encouraging children to sort leaves into different sizes and shapes or in using natural items to make pattens with. To the sensory benefits of playing with leaves which develops the children's vocabulary as they describe the crunch, rustle and feel of dry leaves that have fallen to the ground. Leaves at this time of year are used regularly at Hambledon Nursery to inspire a range of craft activities under the area of learning known as expressive arts and design. Printing with leaves using Autumn colours and taking leaf rubbings and choosing beautifully coloured leaves for making light catchers to place in the windows for example.

Instead of hiding inside from the cold and windy weather, we head outdoors more than ever to talk about the changes in the natural world, the colours, the weather and wildlife and we follow the children's lead in this respect. The outside areas of the nursery during autumn seem to hold a new level of intrigue for children as they kick leaves, notice new natural objects such as pinecones, conkers, acorns and mushrooms and become more in tune with wildlife. They may notice cobwebs more, spot squirrels and discover feathers on the floor. This makes teaching and learning incredibly easy around this time of year as there is so much to discuss and do, from making log top fires, to creating bird feeders, or sweeping leaves to make pathways on the playground. If the children are showing a keen interest the benefits will be even greater.

This time of year, has also inspired a very special enhanced curriculum opportunity to take place at the nursery as picture here. Henry the hedgehog visited the children who were captivated at watching Henry move, learning about his hibernation, what hedgehogs like to eat and that an adult hedgehog will have around 5,000 spines when fully grown! Did you know that baby hedgehogs are adorably called Hoglets?

Here are Hambledon Nursery Schools Top 10 autumn activities that we will inevitably do with the children at some stage during the Autumn term and that you may like to have a try at home.

1. Leaf Sorting – do this according to colour, size or shape.
2. Hedgehog hotels – Build nests or hotels for hedgehogs with anything you can find outside.
3. Scavenger hunts – take lots of walks to local parks, fields or forest areas. Take a list of things to look out for, or make a journey stick, where children can tuck ‘treasures’ of interest to them as they walk along using thread that has been wrapped around the sticks before setting off or by using little rubber bands to fix things into place with.
4. Colour exploration – Mix colours, talk about colours, add spices to paints like cinnamon and pumpkin spice to make it multisensory and use to make pictures with autumn colours. Colours are everywhere in early autumn so make the most of this.
5. Sensory trays – Bring autumn leaves, pinecones, sticks and twigs indoors and make lovely sensory trays using the natural resources.
6. Woodland animals – This may include talking about hibernation and nocturnal animals, looking in information books or visiting the library to find out more.
7. Bird Feeders – Create bird feeders with children to give the birds an extra hand over the cold winter months.
8. Leaf Sticking – There are many wonderful things that can be created by sticking leaves onto paper or into playdough or clay including hedgehogs, leaf men and wreaths.
9. Counting – count the leaves, conkers, pinecones. Play counting games such as can you find me 2 red leaves etc.
10. Conker painting – The same as rolling marbles in paint but is a great way to start conversations about nature.