Becoming a Force for Nature

Seed Gathering - Prepare

Most tree seeds are contained in some kind of fruit – apple pips and cherry stones are good examples – and they will first need to be extracted and cleaned. The method you should use depends on the type of fruit or seed you have collected – nuts, fleshy fruits, winged seeds or cones.

Introduction

Look at the different seeds you have collected and compare them. What are the differences and similarities? What are the benefits of each type of seed? Would the seed be eaten or carried by the wind? This would be a great opportunity to look at seed dispersal and the life cycle of plants (see other activities for more ideas).

Resources

- Seeds
- Two bowls of water
- A potato masher
- A paper bag

Activity

1. Discuss and compare the different seeds you have collected (see slide 2).
2. Arrange them in their different forms including nuts, fleshy fruits, winged seeds or cones and identify which tree they come from
3. Using the methods described below for each form, prepare your seeds.

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Fleshy Fruits
Mix the berries with water and then gently mash them with a potato masher or similar device. Viable (healthy) seeds will sink to the bottom and the residue (leftover bits) of the fleshy fruit can be composted. For rowan and mulberry, put the berries in a sieve and gently squeeze them with your fingers under running water to release the seeds. The seeds of all fleshy fruits need to be stratified (see next lesson for more information).

Cones
Put your ripe cones in a paper bag to dry out naturally for a few days – but not in direct sunlight, or on a radiator. The cones will open up and release their seeds which will then be ready to be sown.

Nuts
For acorns and chestnuts, separate the nuts from their cups or outer casings and drop them into a bucket or bowl of water. Discard the ones that float and collect those that sink for sowing.

Winged seeds
Winged seeds can be planted with the wings left on. Separate the seeds from each other and from their twigs, then stratify. Of the species that we have chosen, the only exception to this method is wych elm, which is collected in summer and should be sown immediately.

4. Remember to wash hands thoroughly after handling the seeds.

5. The seeds can be stored in the fridge until you are ready for the next stage.

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Useful videos and online resources:

The Tree Council's Seed Identification booklet

The Tree Council's Guide to Growing Trees from Seed

A plant's lifecycle: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AcSgaUBwIn4

Seek By iNaturalist - a free app to help identify trees and nature in your school grounds

Treezilla – a free app to help you identify trees and work out their value and CO_2 storage capacity

Match the fruit and seed to the tree (Woodland Trust) – online activity matching the fruit or seed to the tree name

Tree seed identification: seven common UK tree seeds, The Woodland Trust

Other activities:

- Instruction writing - how to prepare seeds
- Story writing around seed dispersal
- Tree/plant life cycle (stop motion animation)
- Plant reproduction
- Use your microscope to look at the seeds in more detail
- Seed dispersal lessons (one example from Learning Through Landscapes)
- http://hellotrees.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Autumn_Tree-seeds-with-wings.pdf
- http://hellotrees.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Lesson-Plan-3_November_birch_windborne-seed.pdf
- http://hellotrees.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Wind-pollination_spring.pdf

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- Research trees - https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife-explorer/trees-and-shrubs