

Introduction

The seasonal world is full of interest and inspiration. As the months change, the natural world appears in all its seasonal glory. Use these resources to deepen children’s understanding of the world and experience of the cycle of the year.

The resources in this collection offer children opportunities to collaborate, share ideas, speculate, imagine and investigate. They will be able to explore the seasons and their characteristics through imaginary play, outdoor activities, weather predictions, and engaging in language-rich play.

The resources can be used separately or together to offer a range of learning opportunities. They are suitable for times of transition – just like moving between seasons – and can be used with Year 1 children who may need additional language support.

Resources in the collection

YD1197 Let’s Investigate – Nature

This set of eight stones encourages children to examine, compare and sort the different natural objects. Items featured are acorn, dandelion seedhead, feather, pine cone, snail shell, spider’s web, sycamore leaf, and sycamore seeds.



YD1031 Weather Stones

The simple weather icons on this set of stones enable discussion of how they relate to these conditions in real life, how these affect us and what we think of them. Lots of opportunities to hear, consider and respond to the views of others. Symbols shown are dark cloud, light cloud, hail, rain, rainbow, snow, sun, sunny intervals, thunderstorm, and wind.

YD0200 Four Seasons Trees – Wooden Play Set

This set of double-sided trees shows foliage across the seasons, with each tree shown in two of them. In addition, each tree includes an animal to spot, discuss, research and learn about.

Trees featured: apple, beech, cherry, Douglas fir, hazel, oak, Scot’s pine, and silver birch

Animals featured: bee, blackbird, butterfly, crossbill, crow, deer, goldcrest, jay, long-eared owl, merlin, mouse, pheasant, rabbit, robin, squirrel, and woodpecker.



YD1204 Let's Roll – Seasons

This set of six rollers offers an engaging way to explore the seasons of the year. The rollers will provoke curiosity, extend interests and develop fine motor skills. Simply roll one into play clay and use the stamp to complete the scene. The set includes:

Spring: daffodil and flowers, egg and bird's nest, blossom and orchard, lamb and sheep, froglet and tadpoles, and duckling and duck

Summer: sunflower and garden, strawberry and strawberry patch, seedhead and dandelions, swallow and rooftops, owl and mother owl, and butterfly and flowers

Autumn: falling leaves and tree, blackberry and bramble, carved face and pumpkin, acorn and squirrel, spider's web and plants, and apple and apple tree

Winter: bird and branches, snowflake and snow, holly and winter wreath, face and snowman, reindeer and mountains, and star and fir tree.



Developing learning through conversation

Well-grounded communication skills are vital to children's development in all areas of learning, enabling effective use of language, helping with making friends and understanding activities. Spoken interactions are central to good practice, so thinking about comments and considering the nature of questions will have a huge impact on language development and engagement. Those questions that begin with 'what', 'where', 'when', 'why', 'who' and 'how' provide opportunities for extended interactions. Try using 'Tell me about ...' or 'I wonder ...' to promote deeper exchanges. Listening to what a child is focused on, responding accordingly and then expanding the conversation will offer greater opportunities to extend their learning.

Activity ideas using the resources

Invitation to play

You will need: Let's Investigate – Nature, Weather Stones, Four Seasons Trees – Wooden Play Set, Let's Roll – Seasons

Display these resources in a way that invites play and engagement. Provide additional materials such as leaves, stones, wood, dry soil, and so on. Such natural resources offer a greater range of tactile and sensory feedback, which often enhances play and language development. Display related story and non-fiction books alongside, particularly those enjoyed by the children. Provide equipment for the children to record their play should they wish to.

This invitation to play will encourage children to follow their own interests, collaborate in deep play, and develop descriptions, explanations and narratives for a range of purposes.

Conversation prompts

Observe the children's play so that when you engage with them you are able to focus on their interests as a way to extend their conversations and learning. You could try the following:

- What are you planning here?
- What's going to happen next?
- Why have you put these here?
- How will you use these?

Look for opportunities to ask children to elaborate on what they said:

- Tell me more.
- What else can you tell me?

Provide a supportive environment for them to share ideas.

For older children, help them to speculate, hypothesise and justify their thinking. Such collaborative conversations encourage effective interactions.

Vocabulary

- Beginning, middle, end
- Next
- Then
- Scene
- Story
- Plot
- Character

Exploring trees



You will need: Four Seasons Trees – Wooden Play Set

Take the trees into your outdoor space, on a nature walk round the neighbourhood or to a local park. Use them to find matching trees for the following activity, depending on the season. Take time to plan the route and tasks with the children beforehand, promoting careful listening and responses/questions that are relevant to the trip. Older children may want to write down instructions for the trip following the discussion.

Try to do such a walk in each season so that the children can reflect on the differences they see and feel. Video footage of each walk will help with such reflections.

The wooden trees have lots of amazing details. Each tree is shown in two seasons. This alone provides lots of points of comparison. The set can also be sorted in to seasonal groups. Sorting the trees in such ways will involve collaboration as children justify their thinking and consider the views of others.

In addition to the details of the trees, each piece has a different animal depicted. These images will help children engage with the animals, describing them, comparing them, using the descriptive language to tell stories about them. Encourage this by asking and inviting questions as a means to learn more, as will referring to favourite story and non-fiction books about them. Older children could write labels for both the trees and the animals.

Here are some examples of questions:

- What animal is in/on/under the [name of tree]?
- What do the trees in [season name] look like?
- How do you know this tree is in [name of season]?
- Why does this tree have bees/butterflies on it?

Conversation prompts

- What route shall we take when we go to the park?
- What do we need to think about?
- What shall we take?
- Tell me what you're doing.
- I wonder what we can do with our prints.
- Tell me about your tree.
- Why do you think this tree has [give attribute]?



Vocabulary

- Leaf/leaves
- Flower/blossom
- Route
- Left/right
- Directions
- Sort/compare
- Similarities/differences
- In/on/under

Talking to the trees

- Take a square of fabric and affix some blossom face down on its surface using masking tape. Turn the fabric over so the flowers are on the reverse. Place several paper towels over the area and tap it all over with a hammer. As you do so, imprints of the blossom will appear on the cloth. Check underneath the paper towels occasionally to see how the composition is developing. The finished piece can be used for a birthday card or similar. Don't wash the fabric as you may lose the colour. Be careful about how much blossom you collect from individual trees. You only need a small amount for this activity.
- You will find several downloadable free resources of helpful information by following the link below. This includes a poster of all the trees which the children can use as a visual memory prompt: [Tree downloads](#)

On a roll



You will need: Let's Roll Seasons

Let's Roll Seasons will help to develop gross and fine motor skills and enrich storytelling. When a child rolls one of the cylinders in play clay, whether away from / towards themselves or across their body from side to side (crossing the midline), they will produce a scene. This scene can be added to by using the stamp at the end of the roller.

There is much that can be learned by exploring the themes of the rollers. Several of the rollers show the life cycle of different animals, which will prompt good discussion points. Here is a question per season to try:

- What would you carve into a pumpkin?
- How would you make a snowman?
- What flowers should we grow?
- How shall we prepare these strawberries to eat?

Conversation prompts

- Tell me about your scene.
- How do you know which season this is?
- How do these rollers work?
- I wonder how I use this picture on the end of the roller.
- Why have you joined these two scenes?
- When did your story take place?

Use the creative process to encourage older children to explain their intentions before they compose their scene.

Vocabulary

- Roll
- Press
- Stamp
- Push/pull
- Towards / away from / across
- Backwards/forwards



Learning through the seasons

- The season rollers will prompt children to look for other natural items to roll/stamp in play clay or other base materials. Have a good supply of such seasonal items for children to choose from: seeds, cones, grasses, twigs, flower heads, and so on. Some leaves, fruits and vegetables will make good prints if sliced in half, dipped in paint and the cut side pressed onto a sheet of paper. Ask children to describe the object they have chosen. Invite them to do the same for another staff member to help embed the vocabulary in different contexts. Repeat what they say and add some further descriptive words to increase their vocabulary.
- Children can work individually or together (using a larger area of play clay or sand) to make a canvas on which they can create a seasonal-scape. They can use the same roller to form a single repeating scene, or several rollers to create something more varied. The same can be applied to the stampers. Encourage younger children to retell or record their stories. Older children may enjoy beginning to create labels for their scenes or to write their stories down.
- Building on the above, exerting, moderating and sustaining finger and hand pressure are further important skills for children to gain. Use paint rollers – both short and long handled – inside with paint and outside using water. Pizza cutters, pastry rollers and similar items used with play clay help children work at these skills on a smaller scale.

Natural selections

You will need: Let's Investigate Nature

The items shown on the stones are easy to find outdoors, so can be used as prompts for nature walks in your setting, local park or wood. Allow the children to lead the planning of the visit. They will need to collaborate, explain their views and consider those of others. Older children may want to make a list of what's needed to prepare for the visit. When at your destination, gather items that match those on the stones. If other items are proposed, ask the children to explain why these should be collected.

Find ways to sort the items you gathered during the visit. Ask the children what criteria to use, getting them to think of as many ways as possible, repeating the ways they come up with to embed the vocabulary. Once sorted, use the collection to create collages for the current season.



If you keep the collages or photographs of them, they can be compared to ones made with objects later in the year during a different season. Ask the children to comment on the similarities and differences they notice. You might want to explain this plan to the children so they can speculate as to what the differences might be. These comments can be recorded and revisited when the time comes.

Older children may enjoy making audio seasonal collages using a suitable recording device. Rain hitting covered areas, rustling autumn leaves, birdsong, and so on make fantastic sound pictures, increase audio discrimination, focus concentration, and promote discussion and collaboration.

Conversation prompts

- What do we need to think about for our visit?
- I wonder what equipment we might need.
- Tell me about what you've found.
- How do you think [season] collages will look different to these?
- Why didn't we find any flowers [or seasonally-appropriate object]?
- Why is the sycamore seed that shape?
- How are the dandelion seeds dispersed?
- What might happen if a squirrel forgot about an acorn it buried?



Vocabulary

- Length/height
- Wide/wider/widest
- Long/longer/longest
- Short/shorter/shortest
- Point(ed)/ridge(d)/curve(d)
- Narrow/wide
- Shell, seed, cone, nut
- Sort/compare
- Similarities/differences
- Different from / similar to
- Rough/smooth

Knowing more about nature

- These stones are ideal for taking rubbings from and making imprints in play clay, providing lot of sensory and tactile feedback. Cleaning the stones afterwards works in a similar way. The rubbings can be cut out and used to create artwork or repeating patterns. Both being good ways to encourage children to explain what they have done. Ask older children to hypothesise what comes next in a pattern you have created. This is a good opportunity to introduce/consolidate positional language.
- Choose a dry day to take the children on a nature walk in a nearby park or wood. Give each child a small container to collect natural objects such as leaves, twigs, nuts, seeds, blossom. Each child can present their findings on a sticky strip of paper. This can then be folded round and the ends attached to create a bracelet – their own nature jewellery. Again, lots of opportunities to talk about patterns and positioning. Challenge older children to collect only objects of one colour and arrange them in a pattern they can explain to someone.
- Creating leaf crowns by sticking gathered leaves points uppermost on a ring of card will take this learning and vocabulary in to a different context, in which children can apply their learning and use their newly-learned vocabulary, discussing the process and results. You can talk about sequencing by asking the children to place the leaves in a pattern.



Sunny side up

You will need: Weather Stones

The simple, clear icons on these stones mean it is easy to relate them to current weather conditions. Children will enjoy looking at what is happening outside and finding a weather stone whose symbol matches the condition. Asking children to collaborate by discussing which symbol to choose will enable them to respond to the views of others, ask questions to clarify, refine their thinking and agree on a way forward. Ask the children to explain their choice to others so that they have the opportunity to express their views in a different context.

For older children, ask them to forecast the weather for the day. They could do this by discussing the current weather conditions and speculating about what this might mean for the rest of the day. Alternatively, they could interrogate an actual forecast, perhaps by using an app or a printed forecast from that day's newspaper (online or paper copy). Ask them to articulate their findings and use them to create a visual forecast using the stones.

Encourage personal reflection too:

- What does [weather condition] feel like?
- What might you need to do if it is [weather condition]?
- What do you enjoy doing in [weather condition]?
- Why is that?

Conversation prompts

- What's the weather like at the moment?
- What stone shall we use to show it?
- Why do you think it is hot/cold/wet today?
- I wonder what the weather will be like later today.
- How might we find out?
- What did you learn from the forecast?
- How might we display your findings using the stones?



Vocabulary

- Cloud
- Hail
- Rain, drizzle, shower
- Rainbow
- Sleet, snow
- Fog, mist
- Sun
- Warm/cold
- Thunderstorm, thunder, lightning
- Wind, breeze
- Weather
- Forecast
- Now, next, later, earlier
- Today, tomorrow, yesterday

Further ideas for using Weather Stones

- Place a sheet of photo-sensitive paper in a flat tray outside in a sunny spot. Arrange collected natural objects such as twigs, leaves, long blades of grass on top of it. Leave this set up for a few minutes before removing the objects. Soak the paper in a tray of water for a minute. Allow it to dry. Once dry, you should be left with a sun print to share with others. The magic of this activity lies not only in what happens but also in the opportunities it provides for speculating and hypothesising, sharing and responding to ideas, and asking relevant questions.
- Challenge children in pairs to take it in turns to draw round their partner's shadow. This can be done with other objects too. If the sun is not out, try using the wooden trees, with a torch used to cast the shadow onto some white paper.
- The following activity also provides lots of opportunities for children to discuss what might happen and justify this by sharing thoughts clearly. It needs to be a sunny day for this to work. Place some aluminium foil on the ground in a sunny spot. Break up some wax crayons into small pieces and place these inside a metal cookie cutter on top of the foil. As the wax melts, it will run together to fill the cutter. Once cool it will have formed a single solid shape.
- Another idea to consolidate prediction, explanation and justification skill involves filling a large glass jar full of water and spraying some shaving foam on the top. Drop blue food colouring on the surface and watch it filter through the foam to create 'rain' in the water of the jar.

Children's books to enjoy together featuring seasons

Reading with children and actively commenting on the text and illustrations will allow them to experience language structures and a rich range of vocabulary.

Percy the Park Keeper by Nick Butterworth

Leaf Man by Lois Ehlert

The Big Alfie Out of Doors Storybook by Shirley Hughes

Trees, Leaves, Flowers & Seeds published by Dorling Kindersley

What's That Tree? by Tony Russell