

For adults and children in the garden or outdoor area

Making birds nests

Natural England wants to give a million children the chance to discover the outdoors. The natural world is a fascinating place to explore and our natural habitats together with the creatures and plants that live there can provide endless sources of fun. From your own back yard to the wilds of our national nature reserves, now is the time to make the most of the outdoors and go wild!

Together with Fiona Danks and Jo Schofield (www.goingwild.net), authors of Nature's Playground, Go Wild and Make it Wild (www.franceslincoln.com), we've produced these fantastic activity sheets to give you plenty of ideas of what you can get up to, what are you waiting for?



Nests provide shelter and warmth and, most importantly, a safe place where adult birds can lay and incubate eggs and rear their young. Some species build incredibly intricate, finely woven nests, delicate and light yet strong enough to hold and protect the eggs and nestlings. Nests made by human fingers cannot compete with the complex structures created by birds but, it's fun to have a go, using whatever materials can be found. Search for nesting materials in the garden, then weave and twist them into nest shapes, lining them with soft beds of moss, grass and feathers.

You will need

- Bendy twigs for weaving
- Grass, moss, feathers etc to line the nests





How to make the nests

- Show the children a photograph of a nest, or better still a real bird's nest making sure that it is an old abandoned one and not in use. What materials are used? How are they put together? Birds' nests are made in all sorts of shapes and sizes: a magpie's nest is an untidy assemblage of large twigs high up among the branches, whereas the blue tit builds a neat nest of moss, wool and feathers, often concealed in a hole in a tree or wall, and the house martin moulds a nest of mud against the eaves of a building. The most familiar nests are the cup nests, built by birds of woodlands, hedgerows and gardens, such as this one made of woven stems, grasses and moss.
- Encourage the children to collect suitable nesting materials. Birds use twigs, grasses, stems, rushes, mud, moss, lichen, feathers, seedheads, sheep's wool, spiders' webs and animal fur. Some even use man-made materials such as string, plastic twine or bits of paper. The materials have two main functions: to provide support and to insulate.
- Remind the children how easy it is for us to collect materials, while a small bird makes hundreds or even thousands of journeys to gather everything it needs. Perhaps they could pretend that one hand is a beak – how long will it take them to collect all the materials for their nests?

Safety tips

- Wash hands after working with natural materials.



- Weave and thread twigs or stems together to make the base of the nest, and then line it with softer materials. The nest could be any design – large or small, open or covered – so long as it holds together. A bird would weave the materials roughly in place, and then sit in the centre of the nest and turn round and round, pushing downwards and outwards with its breast to create the right shape. Encourage the children to imagine their fist is the bird's body; perhaps by turning it and applying gentle pressure, they might be able to create a cup-shaped nest.
- Put the nests in trees or shrubs or in a hedgerow or wall. Youngsters like to believe that a bird may come along and use their nest, so encourage them to find a place that is protected and safe from predators.
- Although a real bird won't be tempted to use the nest, perhaps a few chocolate eggs might magically appear, especially if it is nearly Easter time!