

For adults and children in the garden

Making a pit or pan fire

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?



Sitting around an outdoor fire on a warm, clear summer's night is a wonderful way to bring people together and enjoy the garden after dark. Have a go at making a small, safe low impact fire in the garden, perfect for some special family time sharing stories, toasting marshmallows, watching bats and looking up at the stars.

Pit fire

If you have an area of slightly rough grass in the garden, this might be the perfect spot for a pit fire. Lift the turfs from an area of about 1m/39in square, and heap them together ready for re-laying later. Make your small fire on the bare soil in the centre of the square, using dead wood gathered from the garden or from the woods. Build a tepee of dry kindling over a bundle of tinder then strike a match as close to the tinder as possible. »

As the kindling starts to burn, add more fuel gradually, starting with the smallest material. Don't pack fuel too loosely: the flames need to pass from one stick to another or else the fire will burn out in the centre. If you pack it too densely, the air won't be able to circulate.

Make sure the fire does not scorch the grass. Let the fire die down completely before leaving it – and the next day mix and loosen the ash and soil before replacing the topsoil and turfs. Water the grass and let it recover.

Pan Fire

Fire pans allow you to make a small, contained fire off the ground. These photographs show a few of the options – but any metal container from a dustbin lid or hubcap to an old wok or frying pan would do. Always raise the pan on rocks, wood or metal legs to avoid scorching the ground beneath.

Toasting marshmallows

This is always popular – but why not have a go at making your own skewers as well? Select strong straight non-toxic twigs (e.g. dogwood or hazel) about 1foot/30cm in length. Using a sharp knife, scrape the bark off the twig and sharpen one end to a point. Then thread marshmallows on to the skewers and hold them over the glowing coals; they should go crispy on the outside while staying wonderfully gooey in the middle. Yum!

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Safety tips

- Keep your wood supply a little way from your fire.
- Never leave a fire unattended.
- Don't make your fire close to flammable materials.
- Always let your fire burn down to embers before leaving it.
- Always supervise children and young people when using fire.
- Have a supply of water nearby, in case you need to extinguish the fire or soothe burns.



Disclaimer: Please note, anyone taking part in these activities do so entirely at their own risk. Natural England together with the authors and publishers of these activities do not accept any legal responsibility for any harm, injury, damage, loss or prosecution resulting from the activities described.