

Spring term 2020.

After school forest club and outdoor play and learning.

It has been a while since our last newsletter as we have been working hard in the background to provide some exciting new opportunities for our forest school groups, and the school, in 2020. Last year saw the school becoming the Devon winners of the Bath and West Show Environmental Youth Award and we plan to build on that success this year, with some exciting new initiatives. Our final forest school sessions for the year, in the winter darkness, included bug hunting with torches, jumping into piles of autumn leaves, woodland crafts, cooking and shadow puppets. We have given the woodland a short break to recover from the terrible weather and are back for our spring activities. For the remaining first half of this term we have invited our forest school groups to get involved, if they wish, in applying the finishing touches on the outdoor classroom, with some fun opportunities to dig, plant, build and decorate. At the end of this half of term our usual food week will be transformed into an outdoor party for each group, to celebrate their contribution.

This year we formally launch the Garden Connections project at the school. The funding provides a large polytunnel, chickens, over £2,000 of new plants, woodworking tools and wood to start construction on garden essentials and ornaments. There is also a research opportunity for the children with local, elderly residents, the production of an e-book and a new community gardening group based at the school. Kim Roberts, an HE illustration student at Petroc, has visited the school to talk with a group of children. She is using ideas from this discussion, plus the ideas and thoughts about the school's outdoor spaces that every child in the school was invited to contribute on a postcard, to create an illustrated resource, possibly a story book, that will encourage the children to engage further with the outdoors.

Our forest school groups will have additional time to access all these new outdoor resources in our regular sessions, so lots of exciting activities to explore this year. We will be encouraging the children to learn traditional green woodworking and weaving skills, to take a leading role in propagating new plants and taking cuttings, grow our own craft resources and find out more about caring for the school's wildlife and domesticated animals. There will also be all the old favourites – including messing about in mud, building dens, clay modelling, woodworking, climbing trees, pond dipping, sharing stories and ideas around the fire and the very popular outdoor cooking sessions.

The Garden Connections project includes opportunities for older siblings, parents, grandparents and the wider community to get involved. These opportunities include practical planting and garden maintenance sessions, growing food and collecting eggs to share and sell on site, garden construction, sharing in the care of plants or chickens during weekends and holidays, exchanging gardening skills and gardening experiences with each other in social gatherings and helping to maintain a website and social media etc. So do let us know if any of these might be of interest to you, your family or friends. We are also looking for individuals who would like to join child representatives from each class, teachers and Mudtastic staff in forming a project management team.

We will also be continuing our regular forest friend get-togethers, where families of our forest school members can come and help to improve the forest school resources, followed by an informal barbecue session.

And there is more - Mudtastic has been working with the school to help to develop a specific woodworking strand within the design and technology curriculum, and we are constructing a woodworking bench in the forest school shed. The forest school children have helped us to test and review different tools before we buy them in quantity. We are also now working on a large heritage lottery bid that could bring another exciting new outdoor resource to the school and community (more on that as it develops). Other plans for this year include working with the children on the pond area and developing our wildlife-friendly stump garden. You will also start to see some large and small woodland sculptures pop up in the woods. You may already have noticed our owl and in last year's sessions our groups worked on some bee themed art. Keep an eye out for these appearing over the next few weeks and for some larger ones later in the year.

Craft workshops - After our successful Christmas crafts workshops, we are now planning to introduce a monthly Saturday family crafts session and possibly some regular evening craft sessions for adults. More on this soon.

A big thank you to all the children and adults who has supported the forest school over the past year, and to the school for continuing to warmly welcome us into their school family.

Forest Families Group

Our parent and toddler group held on a Thursday during term times had a busy Autumn term starting with the theme 'hibernation' the group worked together making number of hedgehog homes and a variety of bird feeders for the vast array of wildlife that visits the jungle. We also had a group effort to work on the storytelling den, so parents and toddlers helped to build up the sides with natural resources, some of the little ones were keen to use the bow saw and loopers and although it's not quite waterproof it makes a fun cosy place to tell a magical story.

During the second half of the term the group really opened a connection with nature as we worked around the five senses. We often found ourselves lying in the leaves looking up to the sky listening to different sounds around us and exploring different sounds with sticks and shakers filled with stones or small twigs. Foraging for wild blackberries to taste and cook with stewed apple was a hit on the chillier days everyone sat round the campfire and made up Autumn songs about the leaves and weather. Exploring the sense of smell was definitely the favourite, with highly scented edible forest foods available and good old mud and grass at hand to make potions, the children just kept on building those magical smells over and over again.

Halloween brought us some creative experiences with one side of our shelter decorated as a huge web covered with the ghosts, spiders and pinecone bats, the parents got particularly creative and it was all hands at the making table for the whole session!

Lastly, we entered the festive period, and each week we made a different Christmas decoration for the home, ivy wreaths, santas, reindeers and woodland angels followed by Christmassy sing-alongs around the campfire with a warm drink and snack, with old and new earthy friends.

Forest Families restarts on Thursday 30th January 2020- 10am-11;30am.

If you would like more info on either of these forest school sessions, or you would like to express an interest in being involved with the project, please contact us for details.

Contact details:

For forest school sessions (after-school or parent and toddler):
enquiries@mudtastic.co.uk or talk to Jayne on 07984655688

For Garden Connections project: lucy.willans@gmail.com or talk to Lucy on 07812201789