

HEALING IN THE FIELDS AND FORESTS

WINTER

Healing in the Fields and Forests is an intercultural, intergenerational foraging adventure involving the Scottish Nepalese community and friends. Funded by Forestry Commission Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage, our project involved eight visits to the local countryside. Here we enjoyed nature through interactive activities exploring the traditional medicinal and cosmetic uses of native Scottish trees and plants, and the folklore surrounding them.

The project is a discovery spanning across four seasons - this is our Winter Story



Forestry Commission Scotland
Coimisean na Coilltearachd Alba



Scottish Natural Heritage
All of nature for all of Scotland

A Walk of Discovery

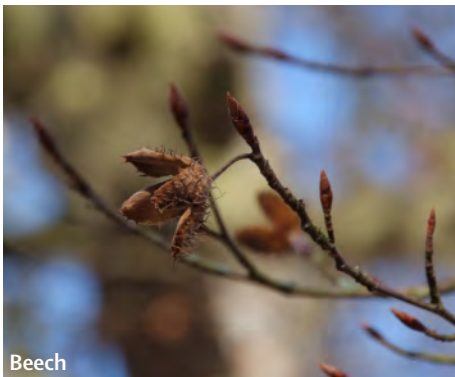
Our first Healing in the Fields and Forests workshop was at Vogrie Country Park in Dalkeith. In the morning we went for a walk. Although it was snowing just the week before, it was now sunny but still quite cold. Buds were just starting to appear on the trees although there was very little green growth. Yet everyone was surprised at the strong smells of the evergreen trees, such as juniper, cypress, pine and fir, also found in the essential oils that we used later in the day. In the afternoon we had a workshop discovering scents and making our own soaps and ointments.



Trees and Plants on the Walk

At Vogrie the first tree we saw was a silver birch tree. Like the willow tree, the bark contains properties similar to aspirin and a pain-relieving tea can be made by boiling the bark. The birch oil has a very strong smoky smell and is anti-fungal. We also found cedar and cypress trees with lovely smelling leaves. On some of the oak trees, a pale grey lichen was growing called oakmoss. The extract of this is dark green and sticky and we used it later to colour the soaps we made.

We also saw many pine and fir trees such as the Douglas fir, which reminded some of us of the Himalayan fir that grows in Nepal. Some of the pine cones contained a sticky resin that had a very sweet smell similar to the benzoin resin that we used in the workshop. Pine oil is very antiseptic so found in a lot of cleaning products where pine is a very popular scent. The tall Scots pines are some of the oldest trees in Scotland.





Making Herbal Soap

For these simple soap recipes we used a 'Melt and Pour' soap base which can be bought from craft shops or from craft websites. Links for suppliers for ingredients used in all our workshops can be found by visiting www.monica wilde.com

We chopped up the soap base, put it into a small plastic jug and melted it on a very gentle heat in a microwave. Once it had melted we added 10 drops of essential oils for each 100g of soap. Some of us added green food colouring or oakmoss absolute to colour our soaps. Some of the soaps also had leaves or mung beans added into the moulds to make them more decorative.



While the soap was still warm, we poured it into a soap mould - at home you could use a margarine tub. Usually you would let the soap harden overnight, but putting it into the freezer made it set very quickly so we could then get the soap out of the mould.



Some popular essential oil combinations were:

Antiseptic Soap

Cedarwood 4 drops
Juniper 4 drops
Lavender 2 drops

Forest Fresh Soap

Lavender 6 drops
Pine 2 drops
Cypress 2 drops

Spicy Men's Soap

Bay oil 5 drops
Rosemary 2 drops
Lemon 3 drops

Sweetie Pie Soap

Sweet orange 4 drops
Benzoin 4 drops
Grapefruit 2 drops



Healing Herbal Ointment

To make an ointment you need a vegetable oil and some beeswax to harden it. We used:
15 g / 3 tbsp beeswax (less for a soft ointment)
5 g / 1 tbsp cocoa butter
60 ml / 4 tbsp sweet almond oil
1 x 50 g tin with screwtop lid

We put all the ingredients into a small plastic jug and melted them on a very gentle heat in a microwave. After they had melted we stirred in 10 drops of essential oils to each measure.

We then poured it into a tin that we had labelled earlier. At this point the tin becomes hot so must not be moved, but be left to cool. Once the ointment has cooled it is ready to use. Ointments can be used for lip balms, facial moisturisers, salves or rubs for aching joints or muscles.

Some popular essential oil combinations were:

Muscle Ease

Pine 5 drops
Rosemary 3 drops
Lemongrass 4 drops

Joint Ease

Juniper 6 drops
Ginger 2 drops
Rosemary 2 drops

Tangy Lip Balm

Grapefruit 7 drops
Lemon 3 drops

Insect Repellent

Eucalyptus 4 drops
Lavender 4 drops
Lemongrass 2 drops

Mature or Dry Skin

Sweet orange 5 drops
Frankincense 5 drops



Children's Woodland Activities

During the workshop, all of us children went outside to explore the woods and parkland. First we collected forked sticks to make a special weaving stick. We wound wool in a zigzag around the framework of the twigs from one side of the fork to the other, creating little nets. As we walked through the woodland we found natural objects along the way - evergreen leaves, flowers, moss, tiny twigs, feathers, grasses, fir cones, bark peelings and winged seeds. We wove these treasures into our weaving sticks, at the same time learning about nature and enjoying our woodland walk. We sniffed plants as we walked past - trees like cedar, cypress and pine smell lovely. We split open a pine cone and sniffed the resin inside it - it was like perfume!

In a clearing in the woods we found a fallen log covered in moss and lichen, home to lots of mini bugs, creepy crawlies and giant fungi. We passed a pond full of tadpoles which will grow into frogs and toads. We discovered how to spot different trees in winter by identifying their twigs:

Hazel twigs have little greeny-yellow catkins- we called them lambs tails

Alder twigs have little brown catkins and tiny red-brown cones hanging in clusters.

Horse chestnut twigs have big rusty-brown sticky buds and bark with little scars shaped like horseshoes.

Ash twigs have silvery grey bark with black sooty velvety buds shaped like little hooves.

Beech twigs have long pointed sticky-out copper colored buds; they looked like tiny fairy cigars!

When we got back to Vogrie House we did nature quizzes and puzzles. Some of us even tried mixing tree oils and making ointments and soaps with the adults. Scottish oak moss and Nepalese oak moss both smelled really strong - we preferred the citrusy smells of sweet orange and grapefruit.

For stick weaving and lots of other great nature activities to do with your family and friends visit the Woodland Trust's Nature Detective resources at: www.naturedetectives.org.uk



Lasting Impressions

"Today has been fantastic. A great experience and very educational!" Tika, 48

"I enjoyed making the ointments, I would like to visit the woods again. Everything was brilliant." Lorna, 10

"My wife and I often go to the woods in Nepal... but making soaps and learning about different trees from Scotland was very interesting." Dil, 67

"Today was adventurous. I liked walking in the woods and would visit again!" Kamana, 15

"I am new here so don't know any woodlands before today... it was a good experience and I would like to come again." Sundar, 21

"Today was fantastic! We should do it every week!" Dipak, 22

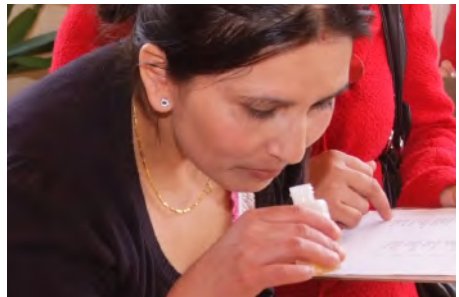
"I find myself happy today as I loved visiting the woods and gaining some knowledge of soap making... I would like to visit the woods again in any part of Edinburgh." Ramesh, 20

"I have never been to the woods before. It was incredible. My best memory of the day was peeling lots of moss from the old fallen tree trunks and wrapping it around my journey stick. I would like to do this more often." Ronika, 10

"I had a great time. I identified trees, plants and birds for the first time today. My best memory was climbing the big tree." Sujina, 10

"My best memory was making my soap with cedarwood, sweet orange and lemongrass. Today I learned that you can even make alcohol from trees e.g. using birch sap." Bhawesh, 27

"I really enjoyed the day with my Nepalese and Scottish friends. My best memory was one of the plants, maybe fern, which reminds me of my village and girlfriend back in Nepal." Turan, 29





Healing in the Fields and Forests promotes the therapeutic and health benefits of wild plants, seeking to inspire a life-long interest in green space and woodlands, a love of nature and the great outdoors.

Project facilitators

Joanna Boyce – Creative Art Works
www.creativeartworks.co.uk
For more information on projects email
joanna@creativeartworks.co.uk

Monica Wilde – Napiers the Herbalists
www.napiers.net
For more information about the recipes
used in this workshop go to
www.monicawilde.com

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Photography by
Kishor Dangol