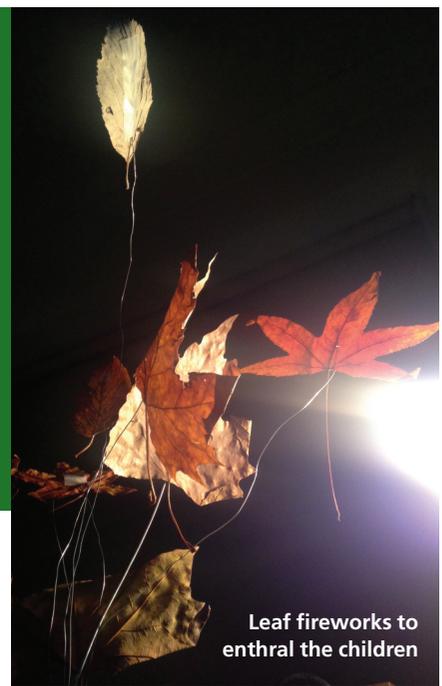


nmtgreat outdoors

# The Great Garden Clear Up!



No scope for gardening in the winter? Not at all, says Francis Smith, who suggests ways of extending the children's outdoor learning while making the most of a winter garden



Leaf fireworks to enthral the children

## Open a bug hotel

With your garden detritus why not create a bug hotel? These can be as prim or as ramshackle as you like. What's important, though, is that pupils learn why the hotel is being created.

Many invertebrates hibernate, but they often have quite different nesting preferences. Ground beetles for example like to find a snug patch within dead logs and twigs; beautiful lacewings like to nestle down amongst dead leaves, and tawny mining bees may dig their way into woody stems. The creation and monitoring of your bug hotel can prompt exciting enquiries into the lives of the fascinating insect residents.

And if there are still leaves left, get the children to help with the sweeping! Stuff the collected leaf piles into black plastic bags, tie these up, pierce holes in the bags' sides and stash away in a discreet corner.

By summer, your sacks' contents should have decomposed into a lovely, crumbly leaf mould. The children can help spread the leaf mould through their garden, a process that will improve soil quality and suppress weeds. ■

A common scene in a nursery's garden at this time of year is a slightly forlorn staff member sweeping leaves or collecting plant detritus from garden beds. The debris is generally unceremoniously disposed of, crammed into groaning bins.

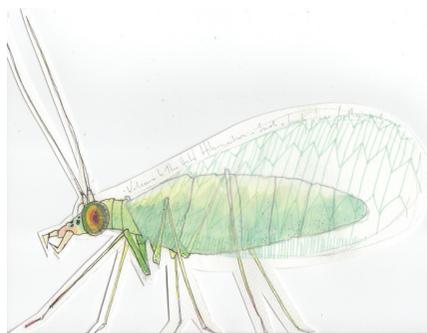
This 'rubbish', however, is an invaluable learning - and garden - resource, and also presents an opportunity to create new from the dead and discarded.

The following early-years-friendly activities will help you make use of these resources, while challenging motor skills, introducing new lines of enquiry and imbuing your winter garden with purpose.

## Leaf firework display

Piles of colourful leaves are one of the season's defining signs. So, why not instigate a fun study of leaf shape and colour by creating your very own leaf-firework display? By mounting leaves on to dark coloured paper you can discuss the varied shapes of the children's leafy explosions.

For example, leaves with friends (or, for the botanists amongst you, compound leaves) are leaves comprised of a number of leaflets (like the horse chestnut). Lonely leaves (or simple leaves, like the oak) grow in isolation. Some leaves have teeth (cherry); some have lobes or fingers (Liquidamber and sycamore). A discussion of the display's vivid



The delicate lacewing

and varied colours can also prompt an explanation of why leaves change colour.

## Feed the birds

If your nursery garden has had a crop of sunflowers (see my previous articles), get harvesting their seeds! Sunflower seeds are an amazing source of nutrition for many garden birds, who will really appreciate the extra food during the winter months. The children will adore tearing through the large, dry flower heads and pulling out seed clusters. Once the seeds have been separated, teach them how to tear off their husks to reveal the beautiful sleeping seeds within.

Stuff these seeds into a bird feeder and hang from an easily visible point within your garden. The children can observe and investigate the colourful worlds of finches, tits and starlings as birds begin regular feeding visits to the nursery's garden.

● From his base at Studio Cultivate, Francis Smith runs practical, outdoor lessons, teaching young children how to grow and nurture plants, creating vibrant, productive garden spaces.

**M: 07506 724 269**

**E: francis@studiocultivate.com**

**Twitter: @cultivateuk**