

Woodland Fairy Parties

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As well as running a Watch group, I recently started a business with my friend running outdoor events for families and school groups. 'Wildwood Days' also offer themed outdoor birthday parties at our forest school site. One of the most popular choices is the woodland fairy party.



All photos by Elizabeth Webley

FAIRY NAMES, TREES, POTIONS AND DUST

The children start off by choosing their fairy name (usually a plant or tree that starts with the same letter as their name). They then have to make a potion using anything natural they can find on the site. We hide a few vases of extra materials such as seed heads, hydrangea flowers, pots of petals and/or berries around the site, as well with a fairy marker next to them (card fairy picture on a stick). We also set up a little area to be the fairy tree – with some mini stumps and glass mushrooms beneath it and some peg fairies and garlands hung in the tree. On one of the stumps is a tiny glass bottle of glitter (aka fairy dust). The excitement when one of the children discovers this is palpable. Once the fairy dust is found we usually put one of the adults in charge of sprinkling a little bit into everyone's potion. This is a great way for the group to get their bearings as they explore every corner of the site. The addition of water, glitter and a stirring stick really makes the potion-making come

alive. Everyone wants to take their potion home so if we can we supply everyone with a little plastic bottle with a lid.

FAIRY HOUSE AND GARDEN

The next activity is making a miniature fairy garden. Everyone gets a large plant pot, a couple of bulbs and a choice of a couple of plants – cyclamen works well, as do many small leaved herbs such as thyme. Once they have filled the pot with compost and planted the plants they can add all the magical details: a tiny wooden fairy house, miniature mushrooms, glass pebbles, coloured gravel, small pebble lady birds, shells, even more glitter and so on.

PEG FAIRIES

The last activity is to make a peg fairy to live in their garden. All you need, other than the wooden peg, is some sharpie markers to draw on the face and some

glue dots (or double sided sticky tape) so that you can stick on some wings and a skirt. We use a mixture of natural materials (leaves or petals) and man-made fabric or shiny card/plastic for the wings.

The party bags contain their very own bottle of fairy dust, a wooden twig wand, another pebble creature to add to their fairy garden and a miniature thank you letter from the woodland fairies.

MARSHMALLOWS AROUND A FIRE!

Every party finishes with hot chocolate and toasting marshmallows round the fire - the parents are usually happy to join in with this bit! They all get a bit of a safety talk first so, depending on the age of the children (and their behaviour during the party). We're usually comfortable with them managing the risk for themselves - especially if their parents are with them. It's a lovely end to the session and we all sing happy birthday sat around the fire circle.



GETTING INVOLVED

These activities could be done on any site and are so effective – the children get really involved.

A few things struck me the first time we ran this party. The first was how much difference a bit of set dressing made to their experience. It doesn't take that much time to hang a few fairies and garlands in the trees, or to hide the potion ingredients and the bottle of glitter but to the children who find these unexpected treasures it becomes the highlight of their day. It also makes them much more observant – once they have found one thing (and realised there might be more) they start looking behind every bush and round every corner. They also start adding meaning to things that weren't intentionally placed – like a downy feather or a brightly coloured leaf. Their imagination comes alive, and the rest of the activities just build on this.

The second thing that struck me was how involved they got in their potions and fairy gardens – the care they took in

choosing ingredients, placing their fairy house or selecting the clothes for their peg fairy. They all spent a lot of time creating the perfect fairy garden, continually adding elements until there was hardly any space left and sprinkling glitter over it all to make it magical.

I was also pleased by how taken up they were with their own 'fairy dust' – hiding it in a fairy area on the site had made it so much more special than if they had seen it being removed from a plastic packet of eight mini glitter bottles!

THE IMPORTANCE OF MAGICAL PLAY OUTSIDE

We love running the fairy parties – doing them outdoors really adds to the magic and it is entrancing to watch the children exploring the site and inventing their own little worlds. The activities are relatively simple but the children really do have a magical experience and go away with some amazing memories. I think this kind of outdoor play is so important, particularly for children who don't often get the chance

to play outside. The activities help them to develop a sense of wonder about the natural world and encourage them to develop their observation skills. I would argue that you can't get children enthused about identification and the science of classification without these two things. For example, searching for potion ingredients gets them to focus on different sizes, shapes and colours of plants and flowers; and thinking of their flower fairy name might get them started on remembering and noticing the names of flowers. This kind of imaginative play is essential in the endeavour to get children interested in the environment. So many children have no idea how to play outside, let alone how to identify a particular plant or insect, so getting children to have fun and enjoy being outdoors is the most important part of what we do.