Being led by the seasons- teaching language and vocabulary through natural spaces. The aim of this booklet is to support practitioners in providing opportunities for children to develop their language whilst interacting with the natural world around them. It is a practical guide to making use of what the seasons provide broken down into the school year. This booklet came about after the experience of delivering outdoor lessons in a forest school garden to the whole of Early Years in an Inner London School. Children made significant progress in their speaking and reluctant communicators, enthused by their surroundings, spoke more freely and were more willing to practice new language.

Our Early Years staff asked for a guide to help them maximise language learning during nature inspired sessions outside.

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| Autumn term  September  Key language  Key texts  Key language  Key texts  October  Check out London Flower Society competition.  RHS schools have great resources  Key language  Key texts  November  Key language  Key texts  December  The woodland trust has bug ID resources.  Key language  Key texts | This is the time for collecting seeds-  Once the plant has flowered it wants to reproduce so it makes seeds where the flower once stood. These seeds hold all the information needed to make new plants of the same type.  Collect dry seed heads to save for later spring planting.  Collect: calendula ,  bean,  pea,  snap dragon    Tomato and rocket  Sunflower and  Nasturtium  Dry these out by placing them on a sheet of paper in a warm place for a day.  Collect in jars or envelopes and label.  Can you find any other types of seeds on your travels?  Out and about you could collect e few hollyhock seeds. Can you remember where the hollyhocks stood? Can you spot the seeds?  What is a seed?  Where do we find seeds?  Some seeds are very rich foods full of oils, protein and minerals.  If we want a seed to grow it will need water, soil and light.  The tiny seed, seed to sunflower  Salad can be planted for cut and grow again.    Herbs can be planted to keep inside in pots  Most herbs can be grown either from seed or from cuttings.  Herbs add flavour to our cooking.  Tabouleh is a salad made from bulgar wheat with fresh coriander and parsley, cubes of cucumber and tomato.  Guess that herb through touch, smell and leaf shape- sage, mint, basil, parsley, thyme, lemon balm and bay  Crush a herb to release the oils.  The wild garden  Start collecting autumn leaves to make leaf mulch for your seed planting in the spring. Place leaves in a bag or box to break down over the next few months. Once the leaves are collected you can speed up the process by shredding the leaves or setting the children to work by cutting the leaves.    Leaf mulch is carbon-rich (brown-material), use it in your compost pile to balance out nitrogen-rich (green-material) waste such as fresh grass clippings.  Use leaf mulch to protect plants and stop weeds from growing.  Introduce making compost as this will be important all year round and is crucial for gardening. We collect our food, fruit and plant scraps to put in our composter so we can make soil for our spring planting.  Prepare a compost bucket to collect scraps in to then transfer to the compost piles in the forest school garden.  Planting bulbs  Either plant directly or keep in a cool dark place for a few weeks before planting in soil.  Healthy soil is full of nutrients. Nutrients come from the natural things we compost. Left over salad, old plants and fruit scraps turn into healthy soil when the worms change the rotting matter into soil.  How can we make our soil healthy?  Worm poo is new soil  A Stroll Through the Seasons  Yucky Worm  Spotting useful plants  Fat hen- great salad for the chickens  Lemon balm  Great for a calming tea or simply to squish a leaf and enjoy its smell.  Wood sorrel  This edible plant grows wild in woodlands and hedgerows. It has a lemony flavour. It is identifiable by its trefoil leaves and white flowers with pronounced veins on each petal.  Which trees give us food?  Fruit trees  Nut trees  Watch a tree go through changes each season.  Notice the shapes of the leaves and when flowers bloom.  Tree- seasons come seasons go  As the weather gets colder it is a good time to start preparing the soil for next year’s spring planting. Digging to aerate the soil where the beds are clear, although some may prefer to use a no dig method to avoid releasing carbon. Take care not to harm any plants still growing. Admire the bugs that help break up the soil.  A favourite activity is to go on a bug hunt searching for bugs under the seating stumps. Take care to put these back to provide the dark habitat the bugs are seeking.  It is also a good time to make a bug home out of recycled materials.  Many bugs, known as arthropods, make their ho me in the s oil. They get their name from their jointed (arthros) legs (podos). Arthropods are invertebrates, that is, they have no backbone, and rely instead on an external covering called an exoskeleton.  Take a look at worms and the role they play in breaking down organic matter to make new nutritious soil.    Look at the trays in the worm composter to see the different stages of decomposition.  Collect the soil from the lowest tray and place on any clear beds  you have. Keep some back for planting seedlings in spring.  Plan out your spring planting. Design a garden.  What are the worms, wood lice and grubs doing?  Bugs clean up waste  What would happen to our natural waste like leaves and twigs if there were no bugs  The Big Book of Bugs  Errol’s Garden  Order any seeds you do not have. Gardening involves lots of planning and patience. We will be planting from seed so we can see the whole process of growing a new plant. This takes time, care and patience. First we must plan.  What do we want to grow?  Making a compost poster      Last chance to plant bulbs for the spring bulb competition. |
| Spring  January  Key language  Key texts  February  March  Planting of seeds can begin in spring 2 and must be complete before the Easter Holidays.  Key language  Key texts  April | Explain to the children that plants are conserving their energy. The trees look dead but they are not. Their roots are doing lots of work.  Trees do not die during the winter; they just go into a form of hibernation called dormancy. Since there is less sunlight in the winter and the tree can’t produce as much food, trees must conserve their energy.  While trees seem dormant above ground, the underground system of roots is busy at work growing, searching, and retaining nutrients to help get the tree through the winter and prepare it for the spring.  Keep that compost going.  Plants are usually still alive even when they have lost their leaves.  A resting plant puts all its energy into its roots.  The Extraordinary Gardener  Compost Stew  Making structures from willow or bamboo for climbing plants such as, beans, sweet peas, honey suckle, to grow up.  Early flowering bulbs start to appear.  Daffodils. Snowdrops  Making pots using natural or recycled materials to start seedlings off. Stuff toilet roll centres with a little newspaper to block the bottom. Add compost and then add your seed.  Use old newspaper to make paper pots. Use an old jar to wrap your paper around and fold over on one side to make the base. Experiment with your technique. Place in a tray to help keep them upright. Conserve for when you will be planting.  Plant Kale for winter harvesting  Plant Potatoes -you can even grow potatoes in an old bin or a bag for life.  Cut back dogwood and willow  Plant chillies or peppers from seeds you find inside your peppers. Keep these inside on a windowsill or in the greenhouse.  Any other seed can be planted as long as the pots or trays stay inside.  Spot signs of spring  Alkenet grows wild- it is an early flowering plant good for bees.  Plum blossom is the earliest blossom to look out for.  Rhubarb is ready to harvest.  We call the flowers on trees blossom.  Blossom will turn into fruits with a seed inside.  Insects, especially bees help the flower turn into a fruit.  Without bees the flower can’t change into a fruit.  A stroll through the seasons  New plants either need transplanting into bigger pots or supporting with twigs.  Sow hardy annuals such as [love-in-a-mist](https://www.rhs.org.uk/plants/popular/nigella), [marigolds](https://www.rhs.org.uk/education-learning/gardening-children-schools/family-activities/grow-it/grow/marigolds), [sweet peas](https://www.rhs.org.uk/plants/popular/lathyrus/sweet-peas), [sunflowers](https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/Resources/Activity/Grow-a-sunflower) and bedding plants. The sowing of hardy annuals could include companion plants such as [borage](https://www.rhs.org.uk/Plants/57301/i-Borago-officinalis-i/Details), [nasturtiums](https://www.rhs.org.uk/Plants/85362/i-Tropaeolum-majus-i/Details), [coriander](https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/grow-your-own/herbs/coriander) or [parsley](https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/grow-your-own/herbs/parsley).  Ensure you are earthing up your [potatoes](https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/Resources/Sequence-Card/How-to-grow-potatoes-in-containers). Do this repeatedly, every time green shoots appear above the soil. Earthing up means putting soil or compost on the young shoots and leaves leaving a few sticking out.  Remember to keep [weeding](https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/Resources/Activity/Weeding) around any vegetables, soft fruits, bedding plants or other garden plants. This will help them establish their roots, grow better and prevents them getting out competed by faster growing weeds.  Weeding out sycamore saplings all over the site as we are under a large sycamore that drops many seeds. Identify the young trees from their leaf shape.  The sycamore is not native to the British isles but is very successful in the climate here. So you can often see sycamores taking over waste-grounds. The seed dispersal sycamores do is very effective. It is native to central, Eastern and Southern Europe and thought to have been introduced by the Romans.  Create more plants for free – take [softwood cuttings](https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/Resources/Sequence-Card/How-to-take-softwood-cuttings) of tender perennials and shrubby herbs such as sage, fuchsia, geraniums, mint and lemon verbena.  Let [spring bulbs](http://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=91) such as tulips, daffodils, muscarri and other bulbs fade and wither naturally. Try to resist the urge to cut them back just after flowering. Allowing bulbs to die back naturally, until the leaves are yellow and straw like, helps them store food for the following year’s flowering. |
| Summer term  April/May  Key language  Key texts  June  Key language  Key texts  July  Key language  Key texts | Plant out all the plants you started off from seed indoors apart from the peppers. Transplant very carefully by making a hole slightly deeper than your pot. Turn the pot upside down whilst holding the plant in place with your hand and fingers on either side of the stem taking great care not to break the stem.  Apple blossom Cherry blossom. Peach blossom    Now that it is warming up, you may need to water your vegetables daily, especially if they are growing in pots. Try [watering](https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/Resources/Info-Sheet/A-Guide-To-Watering-Plants) them in the early mornings or late evenings when it is cool to reduce evaporation of [water](https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?PID=312) and to avoid the leaves getting scorched or wilting. Remember to teach the children to feel the soil. If it is dry it needs watering. Water the soil not the leaves. If the soil is wet it does not need watering. Overwatering can cause the roots to rot.  Keep mixing or turning your [compost bins](https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/Resources/Info-Sheet/Composting-for-schools). The more you do this the faster the waste decomposes. Remember to keep adding a mix of green and brown waste to your compost bin. Learn about this through the [Great Compost Game](https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/Resources/Activity/Make-great-compost-game).  Seedlings, tender young plants, transplanting.  Feel the soil to check if it is damp, wet, sodden, dry,  Oliver’s vegetables  Do you need some fun indoor growing activities for those rainy days? Try growing plants from the dried seeds, nuts and beans in your cupboards with a [store cupboard scientist](https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/Resources/Activity/Store-cupboard-scientist) activity and look at where those products have come from with a [food from home or away](https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/Resources/Activity/Food-from-home-or-away) activity. For older children this could lead to discussions about how travelling food can impact the environment, [food security](https://www.foodsecurity.ac.uk/challenge/), [food poverty](https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal2) and how local seasonal growing could be beneficial.  If you have rainy days followed by sunny ones look out for fungi. Obviously only touch what you are 100% certain about. Oyster mushrooms often spore in rotting wood so look out for them. It is also worth talking about the web of mycelium underground that allows trees to communicate with each other, to share nutrients and to warn of dangers. It is a very collaborative web system.  Roots and shoots  Roots are looking for light  Shoots are seeking water and nutrients  Fungi grow under ground and grow from spores  Humongous Fungus, The Green Planet  Start collecting flowers and seeds heads from [lavender](https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=127) plants and use them to make a [calming lavender bag](https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/Resources/Activity/Make-a-Lavender-Bag), add them to food such as cakes and biscuits, cut and dry them for a dried flower display or use them in other crafts.  If you have lots of lovely flowering plants in your garden remember to keep [deadheading](https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/Resources/Activity/Picking-and-deadheading-flowers) them so they will continue producing new buds and flowers. Use petals collected from flowers and other natural materials in the garden to [make a perfume pot](https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/Resources/Activity/Make-a-Perfume-Pot), [magical garden potions](https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/Resources/Activity/Magical-garden-potions) or to [make a rainbow](https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/Resources/Activity/Make-a-Rainbow).  We eat different parts of plants.  Stems- rhubarb and celery  What leaves do we eat?  Bush fruits and tree fruits  Which roots do you eat?- carrots, turnips  Colours We Eat series (Read and Learn) The Giant Turnip, The Giant Pumpkin |

