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Making The Children's Year

Seasonal Waldorf Crafts with Children

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Marije Rowling



Fully updated revised edition of *The Children's Year* (1986)
by Christine Fynes-Clinton, Stephanie Cooper and Marije Rowling



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Author's Note

The original *The Children's Year* was written in the early 1980s by Christine Fynes-Clinton, Stephanie Cooper and me. We were brand new young mothers keen to create a meaningful home life and to share our ideas. Now after all these years, our individual lives as home-makers and crafters, artists and teachers have been woven from the Waldorf thread into a very rich tapestry. Out of all our experiences we realise that our first book now has the potential to be updated.

As the only one of the original group who has the possibility to free up time, I have had the honour and pleasure to thoroughly revise the book and add many new projects.

Marije Rowling

Foreword

The original *The Children's Year* has continued to delight for over three decades since its first publication. This second edition, *Making the Children's Year: Seasonal Waldorf Crafts with Children*, has been lovingly updated and completely refreshed by Marije Rowling, who has added many new projects. She brings to it the eye of an artist, a parent, a grandparent and a professional; deepening our understanding of colours throughout the seasons and highlighting the importance of craft and beauty. *Making the Children's Year* is enlivened with captivating colour illustrations and clear instructions.

For young children there is a sense of magic as they encounter these images, drawings and activities. Older ones will find creative projects suited to their skills and enjoyment. For adults also the book offers a wide choice of craft, from tissue paper lanterns, a bee house and the old gnome, to a may flower crown and lavender bags, just to name a few. The book aims to encourage everyone's

creative expression. It reminds us that making things by hand brings inner and outer rewards. Moreover, its use for sharing through creativity can bring us together; whether friends, household, family or community.

These days the limitations of mass production and our consumer society are perhaps more widely recognised than in the mid-1980s, when the first edition appeared. Since then the need to re-connect with nature and its rhythms and processes has become even more urgent. The importance of making and self-expression with a seasonal background resonates throughout the year, offering simple yet deeply satisfying pleasures. This is a resource to use personally and with children; a book to bring elements of nature indoors and help us look again at changes outdoors. Here, in a refreshingly new form, is a book to be thoroughly enjoyed.

Judith Large



Introduction

A Colour Year with Seasonal Crafts

When astronauts look down to the Earth they see the most marvellously beautiful planet – the blue planet Earth.

Since the 1970s the concept of Gaia has gained acceptance again – Mother Earth, who has had so many different names in different early cultures.

We saw one aspect of her in Botticelli’s beautiful *Primavera* and in a different guise as Venus draped in gorgeous flower gowns. In spring she shows a tender, gentle, fresh and tentative mood of pale, clean pink or yellow.

As the plants start to grow faster, an outward and upward movement appears to be accelerating. Faster and faster, more and more plants show this joy of growth till midsummer. Colour-wise we are within the active orange and joyous golden, orangey-red mood.

In autumn when the days are getting shorter the Earth breathes in again – everywhere it contracts. Finally all the dried-up brown leaves have floated down to earth and the seeds have been scattered wide into the soil; a sombre violet indigo mood hangs over the land. A dying down like Persephone going into the Underworld.

Around midwinter the mood can be magical as a grand crisp night sky, speckled with stars, looks down onto a very quiet and expectant crystallised Earth. This is a beautiful, deep ultramarine mood, offset with festive red for celebration.

This in turn is followed by a quiet pale royal magenta in anticipation of the appearance of the first shoots, and then the yearly dance can start all over again. Slowly we begin to sense Nature’s moods when we live in the seasons.

This book is about our participation in the majestic seasonal cycle of the year through the nature table with all its craft possibilities.

You will find four large sections, each setting the mood for the season with a description, and a large seasonal festival table and a small nature table.

These are followed by a wide variety of gorgeous, simple projects for children and experienced crafters to make. There is no more heartfelt and joyful way of connecting with children than through doing crafts together. A flickering screen can entertain children so well, but we are seeing its very negative effects so clearly too.

Children are born doers and learn through physical play, imitating people around them (enjoying dusting, washing up, making the bed) and making things. Remember: nimble fingers make nimble minds.

In order for children to feel secure and at home on this precious Earth they need to feel connected to the rhythms of nature. Celebrating the festivals with the nature table is a beautifully creative way of doing this.

I hope that this book will inspire you to make a highly enjoyable journey through the seasons.

Regions, Seasons, Festivals and Crafts

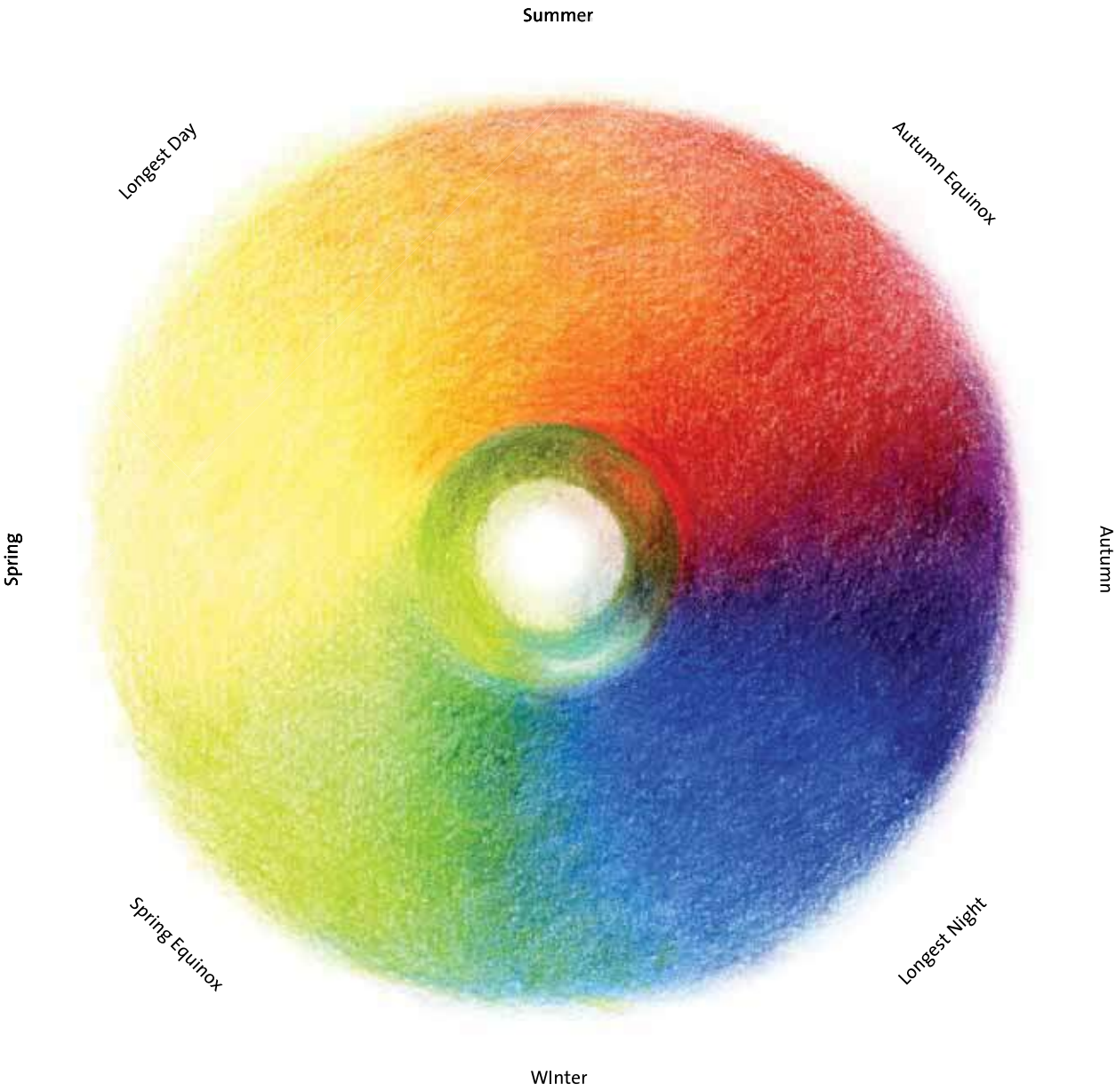
When the plant saps rise in the morning in the east, they start to fall in the evening in the west. A midsummer in the northern hemisphere is a midwinter in the south.

In some regions the seasons are very distinct; in others they only show relatively small differences.

In the original *The Children’s Year* and now in this *Making the Children’s Year* the starting point was our experiences and traditions from north-west Europe.

Here, as everywhere else, seasons, religious festivals and craft traditions have been firmly intertwined until fairly recently. But wherever you are on this Earth you should be true to your time. Your own experiences with the festivals should guide you and become the tool to research into new ways of celebrating them. It is wonderful to see the energy with which more and more people are creating vibrantly new festivals out of the traditional ones.

The Colour Year



However, some festivals have such magnitude that their influence can be felt all over the world at the same time.

You can take the appropriate projects described in this book and use them for your own, adjusted seasonal festival table.

Making the Children’s Year can be a guide for you and your children to develop a love for this amazingly mysterious Earth.

Happy Crafting!

Craft Materials

Quality and colour

Little children are very curious about the world they find themselves in. They love to investigate everything they meet in many and various ways.

An important way is through the sense of touch. Their little fingers remember the feel of the cat’s hair, the keys on Grandma’s piano, rust on a garden spade.

The materials we give them speak of soft or smooth or grainy qualities intrinsically bound up with that one particular substance. Therefore natural fabrics like pure wool, cotton and silk speak of the real world, which is rich and varied and full of life.

Children are also acutely sensitive to colour. Again we can help by giving colours that are suitable for them.

And what joy it is to work with these rainbow colours. They contain a whole gamut of emotions: jolly yellow, fiery red, inward violet, expansive blue, quiet green and all the just-in-between hues. Colours can be pastel for winter and spring or full-bodied for summer, autumn and Christmas. Remember, beige is boring for a child, and black and grey only really suit the serious artist – neither brings joy to the child.

Most patterned fabrics are too sophisticated and fashionable for little ones. They speak a confused language – plain is best.

Supply box

When you get a sudden inspiration to create, the last thing you want to do is to go shopping for the ‘YOU WILL NEED’ section. Always be on the lookout for good deals and the ‘right’ fabric and colour.

It is good to have several boxes or drawers containing essentials. Be on the lookout for seasonal colours of table mats and larger pieces of fabric to place under your simple and larger seasonal nature tables. For the small nature tables the easiest material to use are felt squares in the colours below. You can use a 30 x 30cm/12 x 12” square, and round off the corners or make a circle out of it.

I recommend the following colours for each season:

SPRING	pastel yellowish green (ground) and pastel pink (sky)
SUMMER	plain rich green and orange
AUTUMN	rich golden brown and red
WINTER	white and pastel blue/violet
CHRISTMAS	rich red and deep ultramarine blue

See also the Colour Year on page 9

The following materials are always handy:

- Pins and needles
- Sewing cotton in various rainbow colours
- Sharp scissors and children’s scissors
- Knitting needles – size 3,5 is very useful
- H and 2B pencils
- Coloured pencils
- Sharpener and a good rubber
- Thin printer paper and drawing paper – A4
- Plain coloured tissue paper
- Non-toxic watercolours and a brush
- Fabric off-cuts – plain rainbow colours, pastel and full-bodied
- Knitting wool, double-knit thickness (see above for ‘natural’ and ‘rainbow’ colours)
- Short-cut dyes for wool only
- Food dyes (and even some strongly coloured fizzy drinks if you are really desperate)
- Wooden beads
- Craft knife and cutting mat or board
- Thin, stiff card
- Glue – glue stick, PVA and UHU
- String
- Ribbons (various)
- Ruler, set-square, compass
- Paper fasteners, drawing pins, Blu-Tack
- Tape measure
- Wool tops (long strands of carded wool, about 5cm wide). These are a wonderfully woolly shortcut
- Roving (similar to wool tops but narrower)
- 4 large clear plastic boxes with lids to keep your precious seasonal crafts safe for next year.

Where to find these materials

The secret is to turn into a hunter! Wherever you go, always have the question in the back of your mind, ‘Is that what could inspire us?’ I found a mixture of local craft shops, larger craft supermarkets and online shops supplied me with all I needed for this whole book. See the Resources section (page 236) for help in finding materials.

Nature Table Scenery

Each of the season sections in this book starts with a large festival table and a small nature table. Seasonally coloured veils add magic to these. Each season has its own colours, and dyed veils (page 15) are the most satisfying material to bring out nature’s moods.



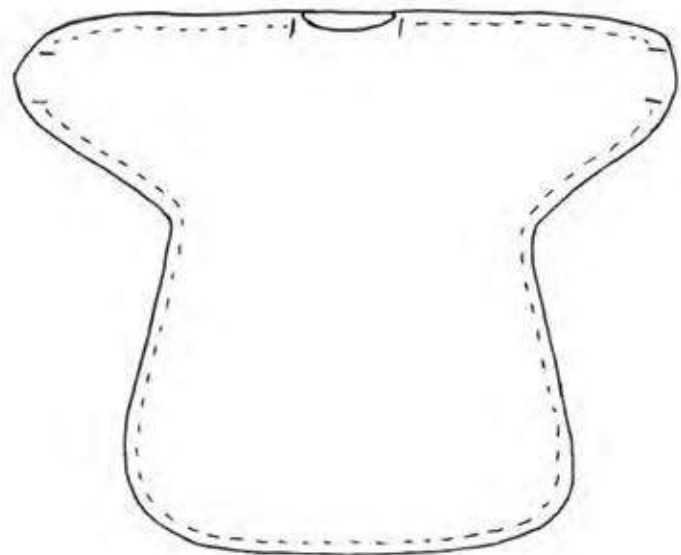
Nature tables can be made in any size from just a few seasonal flowers and objects on a small placemat on the dining room table, to a large display in classroom. Little quiet corners at home are ideal: a shelf, part of a bookcase unit, a deep window recess, a low corner table, an unused fireplace, for example. For these you just need smaller veils to make a backdrop and ground. Very often a bit of Blu-Tack is enough to fix the veils to the wall.

However, on large festival tables at home, playgroups and schools, you can use a pre-made stand over which veils can be draped (see page 15). The ground can be made ‘hilly’ or ‘mountainous’ by placing bricks or small boxes underneath the veils.

Once you start building your set, your imagination has a starting point and can guide you to create beautiful scenery. When one seasonal celebration has passed, the veils can be replaced with the next ones, or you can give the table a little ‘rest’.

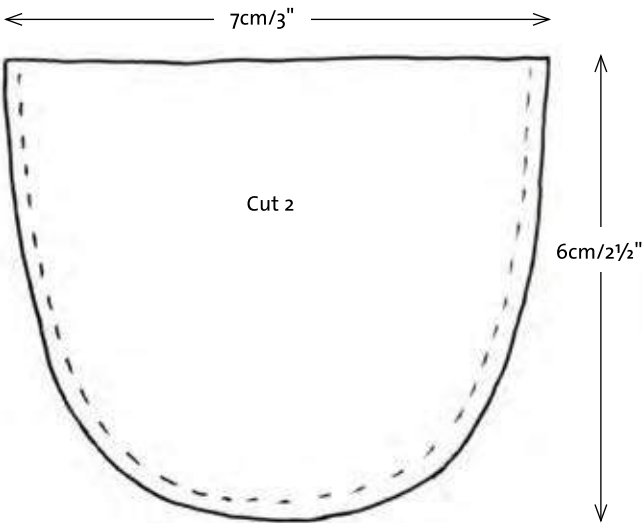
Sister

Follow the same method for the brother but make her a little shorter with a slightly smaller head. Give her a little skirt by following the same pattern, but omit the trouser legs (see right). Just sew straight along the bottom line.

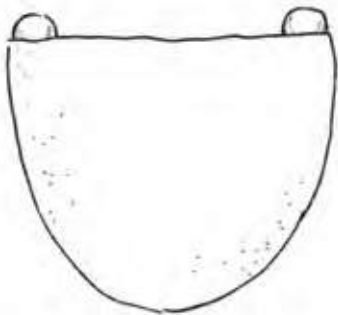


Baby

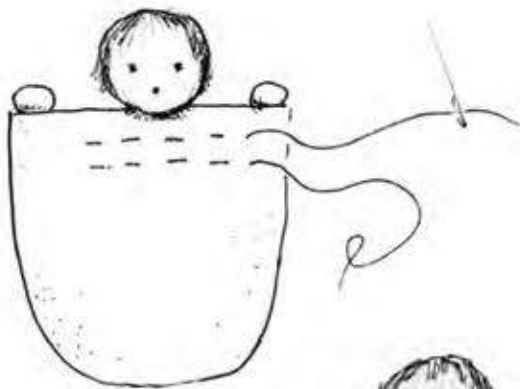
1. Make the head in the same way again, slightly smaller. From the velour cut the shape as shown below, about 7 x 6cm/3 x 2½".



2. Put the right sides together and sew around the edge leaving the top open. Make two tiny hands with stockinette and sew them on each end.



3. Insert the head in the middle and sew up the rest of the top seam. Gather the material a little so that the hands are pulled towards the head.



The family is now ready to play with.

Star Doll

This is the lovely baby of the larger doll family. You can make her with or without a sleeping bag. This doll has a carefully shaped head and needs experienced crafting skills.

YOU WILL NEED

- Gauze bandage, 3 or 4cm/1¼ or 1½" wide and 13cm/5" long (available from craft shops, specialist chemists or online)
- Strong sewing thread or thin crochet cotton – white
- Needle
- Stockinette fabric in skin colour, 13cm/5"² for head
- Slightly stretchy fabric (cotton velour, recycled woollen jumper, good quality T-shirt) – 46 x 13cm /18 x 5" for hat and body
- Felt in contrasting colour to body, 10cm/4"²
- Embroidery cotton in the same colour as body
- Fleece for stuffing
- Small ball of wool, firmly wound, any colour
- Embroidery cotton for eyes and mouth
- Thin paper and pencil for tracing



1. To make the head, tie off the tubular gauze at one end and turn it inside out. Wrap up the ball of wool in a thick layer of fleece to make a larger ball and stuff it into the tube. You should end up with a firm ball about 4cm/1¼" diameter.



Summer

When the sun moves to the highest point in the sky on 21 June, we celebrate midsummer. Nature has followed this upward movement with ever increasing vitality and grows and blossoms with an exuberant display of beauty. The days can be hot and seemingly endless. The magical midsummer nights are very short and with a bit of luck they can be wonderfully balmy. Barely visible flowers fill the air with their scent.

What a grand time to be outside, both day and night. If you live in a town and the local park is your only connection with the seasons, try camping in the country to reconnect with nature in perhaps a slightly uncomfortable but ever so exciting way. Choose your time and place so you don't have to wish away the clouds!

Bees buzz from flower to flower, gathering nectar and pollen. Butterflies flutter seemingly aimlessly enjoying the warm light. Even daytime can seem like a 'Midsummer Night's Dream'. But Titania and Oberon with their hosts of fairies are out to play tricks on us in this dreamy time. It is for us to stay awake.

This is the time for fires – starting with the St John's Fire on the night of 24 June. Traditionally, this is the fire we master by jumping over it!

Then we have our campfires to sit around, singing together in the flickering light that brightens up the warm darkness. We can bake potatoes in that fire (wrapped in foil) and cook soup over it. We can even bake bread over it using a thin 'sausage' of dough wrapped around a stick held over the fire. Marshmallows roasted on sticks over the fire are the best ever dessert.

From a BBQ to a picnic in the long grass, outside eating is fun for everyone. The water in the lakes and the sea is gradually warming up. How exhilarating it is jump into all that freshness! Hours can be spent damming and diverting little streams and rivulets with stones and rocks. Breach the dam and release a torrent of water and send little boats of bark and twigs racing downstream.

One is never too old to play Pooh Sticks on the bridge. Secret little fairy gardens can be created and perhaps the wee folk will show their appreciation by leaving a lovely feather, semi-precious stone or special pine cone.

On the beach we can combine sand and water to create enormous sandcastles. And if the sea is too far away, make the castles in your garden, or even inside on a very large tray, keeping them safe from the rain.

For the rest of our lives we will remember these blessed golden days when all life is play.



Simple Summer Table

When the festival time is over, change your table to a simple one using a golden yellow or orange table-mat or felt square the corners of which you can round off. Just have a vase with seasonal flowers on a golden yellow or orange table mat. Add a few seasonal nature finds, an art card, a crystal.

Remember never to leave a lit candle unattended.

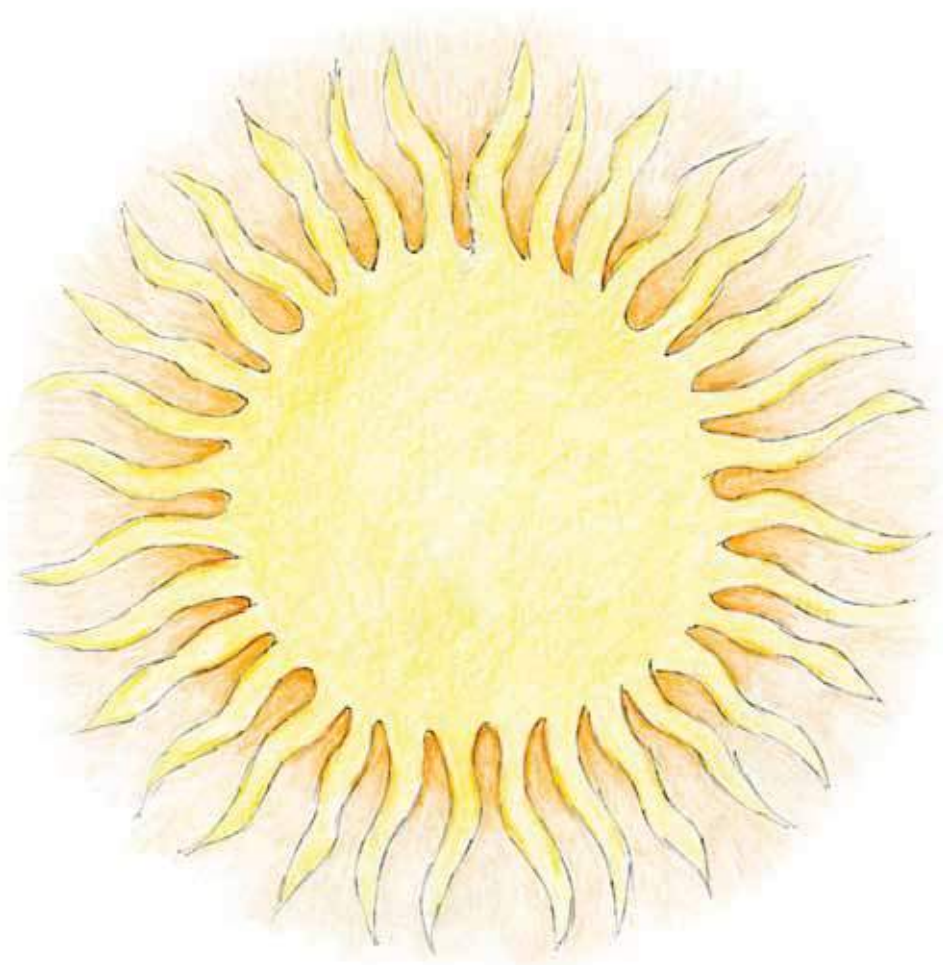


Radiant Sun

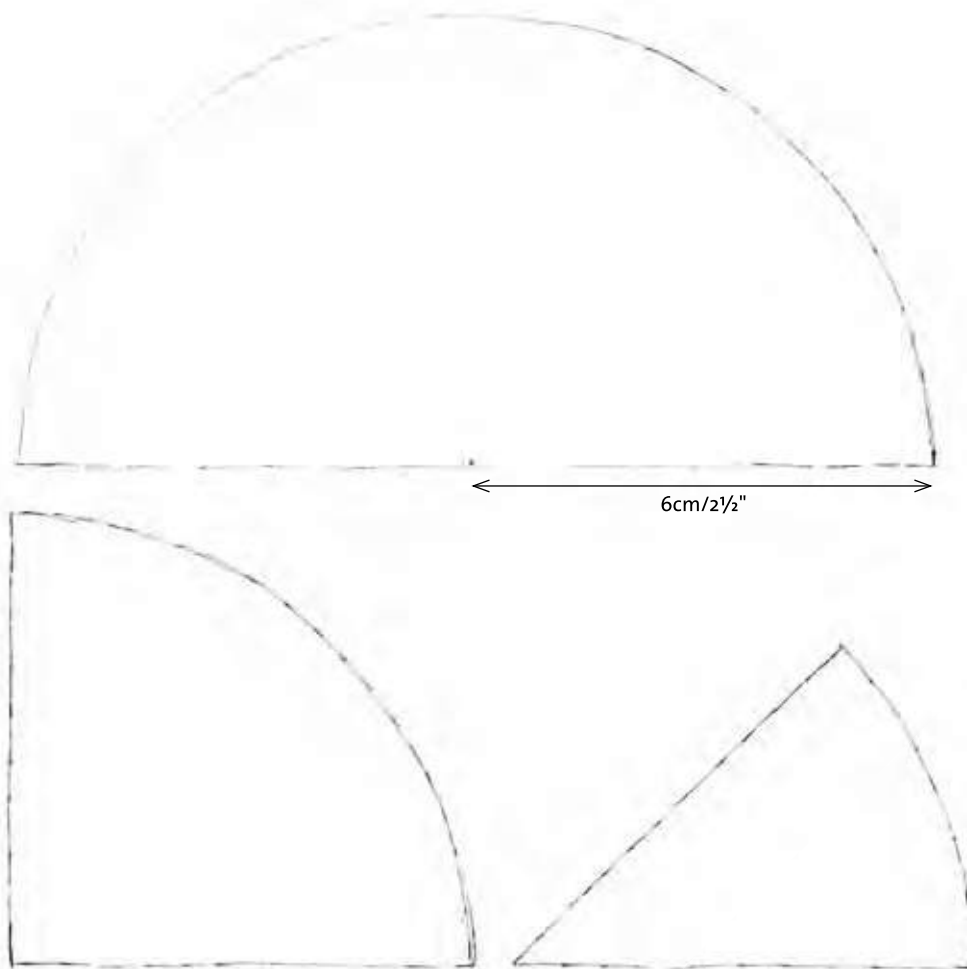
Right now the sun is giving warmth and life to our surroundings. This shining sun can be suspended in your nature table. This is a quick and easy project that requires accurate scissor work.

YOU WILL NEED

- Thin paper for practice
- Shiny gold paper, 15 x 15cm/6 x 6"
- Compass and pencil
- Ruler
- Nail scissors
- Pins



1. Draw a circle with the compass on the thin paper (radius 6cm/2½"). Cut it out and fold it in half accurately, then quarters, then eighths – all with sharp edges.



2. Draw the rays from the outer edge to halfway to the centre fold then cut them out.



3. Unfold it carefully. If it needs adjustment, do it now – this is your practice. Now for the real thing: repeat all of the above with the shiny gold paper. Carefully unfold it and smooth out the fold lines with the back of your nail.

4. Pin it to the backdrop material on your nature table from where it can spread its bounteous warmth.

Fairy Ring

Natural silk is the most delicate of materials; its sheen is unequalled and it can absorb and reflect colour like no other fabric. In other words it is the perfect material for making fairies.

Here is a magic silk fairy ring in beautiful rainbow colours. It can be part of the spring table (page 21) or hung over a baby's cot. Either way it is delightful.

As making it is a delicate process, it is best done by teenagers and adults.

YOU WILL NEED

- White silk strip, 15 x 100cm/6 x 40", the thinnest available (the easiest way to get this is to order online; see page 21)
- Wooden ring 20cm/8" diameter
- Good quality watercolour paints in rainbow colours
- Small containers, for eg eggcups or tiny plastic boxes
- Soft paint brush – large flat-topped
- Clean white plastic or glass work surface
- Clean jam jar of water
- Wool fleece – small quantity for heads
- Needle and white cotton thread
- Scissors



Silk tearing technique

If you have never torn silk before, practise on a small piece of old cotton.

- Make a 2cm/1" cut at the edge of the material.
- Hold the material either side of the cut.
- Quickly and firmly tear it apart. It works much better than cutting and children love watching you do it!

1. Tear the silk into a strip, 15 x 100cm/6 x 40". Gently wash the strip by hand to remove any starch. Whilst the strip is still wet, spread it out on the clean flat surface. Remove all air bubbles by gently spreading the silk out to the edges with your fingertips. Use a little water to make small quantities of paint in the containers – carmine (bluish) red, vermillion (orangey), golden yellow, lemon yellow, Prussian (greenish) blue, ultramarine (purplish) blue, violet (reddish) blue. Test it, as it should not be too strong.

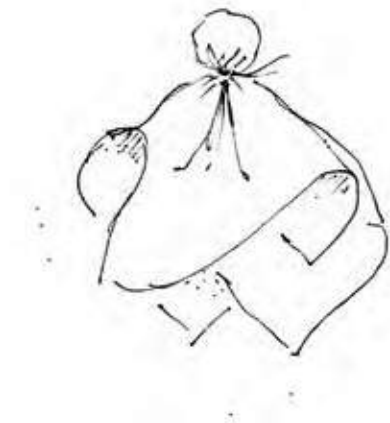
2. Whilst the silk is still wet, use carmine red to paint a block roughly 15cm/6" wide across the silk. Overlap the vermillion slightly.

Follow on with the next colour in the rainbow sequence (see above). Blend the edges by using a clean, dryish brush and brush gently at right angles to the bands, thus painting a gently transitioning colour sequence.

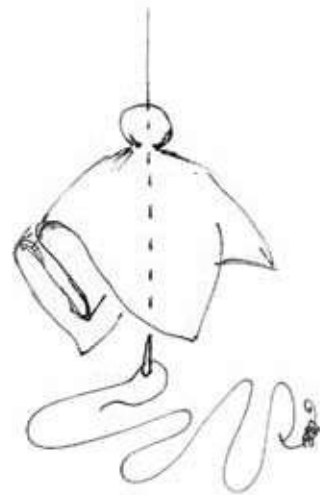
Leave it to dry completely – it will be nice and smooth.

3. Tear it into seven roughly equal pieces. Iron out any wrinkles on a very low heat setting. Trim any threads. Then make a small fleece ball, about 12mm/1/2" diameter (the size of a small marble).

Place it in the middle of a silk square, twist once to form a 'neck', tie the thread around the neck and knot it securely.



4. Repeat for the rest of the fairies. Thread a needle with a 50cm/20" length of thread and tie a double knot at the end. Push the needle through the underside of the head and pull it out through the top. Repeat this for all the fairies.



5. Mark seven roughly equal spaces around the wooden ring and tie the fairies to it in rainbow order starting with the red one. Hang it roughly 8cm/3" down from the ring. Continue hanging the rest equally spaced round the ring, each one about 3cm/1 1/4" lower than the previous one to create a spiral.

Hang the ring over your nature table or somewhere the slightest breeze will make the fairies dance their rainbow circle dance!

Bees

The warmth of the sun now buzzes with insect life. The drone of bees collecting nectar and pollen on perfumed flowers is the epitome of summer.

Here is one made of brown woollen fleece. It is quick and easy to make but is small enough to be a bit fiddly and difficult for little fingers. Once you have made one it is very easy to make a swarm.

YOU WILL NEED

- Woollen fleece – brown
- Embroidery cotton – warm yellow
- Embroidery needle
- Scrap of cotton material or tissue paper – white
- Sewing thread – same colour as your backdrop



1. Tightly roll a bit of fleece between thumb and forefinger into the shape and size of a bean.

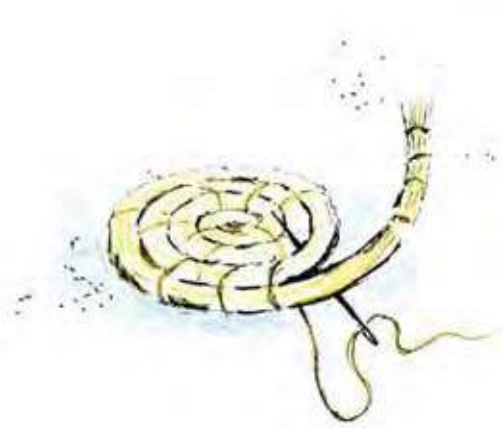


2. Tie off a head with the embroidery cotton.



Grass Mat

Summer is the time when you can find grasses going to seed along the edges of footpaths, in wild meadows, beside a stream. If you can harvest the longest grass before it goes brown, you have a wonderful crafting material. Here are two items you can make for your dining table – table mats and a bread basket.



YOU WILL NEED

- A bundle of long green grass
- Strong, natural twine
- Large embroidery needle
- Scissors

1. Soak the grass overnight in a bath or large sink (don't snap the stalks). Shake it dry. Whilst it is still damp, make a sausage-shaped bundle about 1cm/1/2" diameter. Bind it firmly and knot it as you go, laying more grass along the bundle until it is about 1.5m/5" long.

2. Take one end and roll it tightly to form the centre of a flat disc. Sew it as shown, with the needle and twine. Continue winding the bundle around the disc, sewing it as you go, making it as large as you want it. Cut off the excess length with a tapered cut.

Basket

YOU WILL NEED

- A bundle of long green grass
- Strong, natural twine
- Large embroidery needle
- Scissors



1. Start as if you are making a table mat but use a bundle that is a little fatter, 1.5cm/3/4" diameter. When you have made the base to your chosen size, wind the bundle up over the edge of the disc to form the beginning of the side, stitching as you go.

2. Continue winding a few more layers but don't make the basket too big or it will be floppy. Finish it with a tapered cut and stitch the end to the basket edge.

Flying Streamers

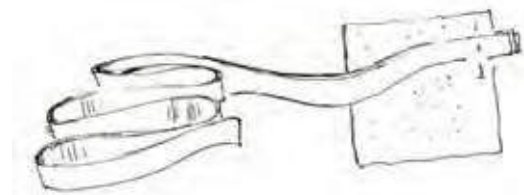
This is fun for outdoors! Twirl this little bag round and round. Let go and watch it fly through the sky so high, sometimes too high ... you might have to be polite to your neighbours!

YOU WILL NEED

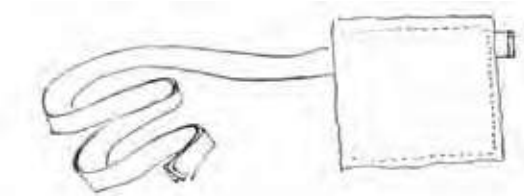
- 2 pieces of cotton in nice light, warm colours, 10 x 10 cm/4 x 4"
- Rice, beans or bone dry sand
- String, about 50cm/20" long
- 3 ribbons in matching bright colours, 2 x 90cm/3/4 x 36"



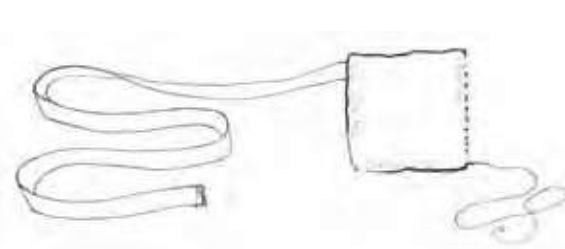
1. Take one cotton square and lay it right side up. Place the ends of the ribbons on one corner of the square, as shown.



2. Lay the second square right side down on top of the first square and the ribbons. Pin together on three sides and sew as shown. Be careful not to catch the ribbons when sewing the side seams. Make *very small* stitches if you are hand sewing.



3. Turn the bag inside out and three-quarters fill with rice, beans or dry sand. Knot one end of the string and insert the knotted end into the corner diagonally opposite the ribbons. Turn in the open edges of the bag and sew together by hand, being sure to secure the string well.



4. Very young children will enjoy just throwing the bag without the string; but a lot more height and distance can be achieved when you do attach the string.

Prepare for take-off into the wide summer spaces!

Stick Streamers

You can twirl it round, make big circles, swoop figures of eight or even write your name in the air! Or just run around stirring up the air.

YOU WILL NEED

- 3 ribbons in matching bright colours, 2 x90cm/¾ x 36"
- Dowel, 2cm/¾" diameter and 60cm/24" long
- Glue and 2 tacks



Glue and tack the ribbons to the end of the dowel. Wait an hour for the glue to really dry.

Beanbag Frog

This frog likes to be thrown from one person to another, or from one hand to the other, or he just sits on a shelf with his legs dangling down.

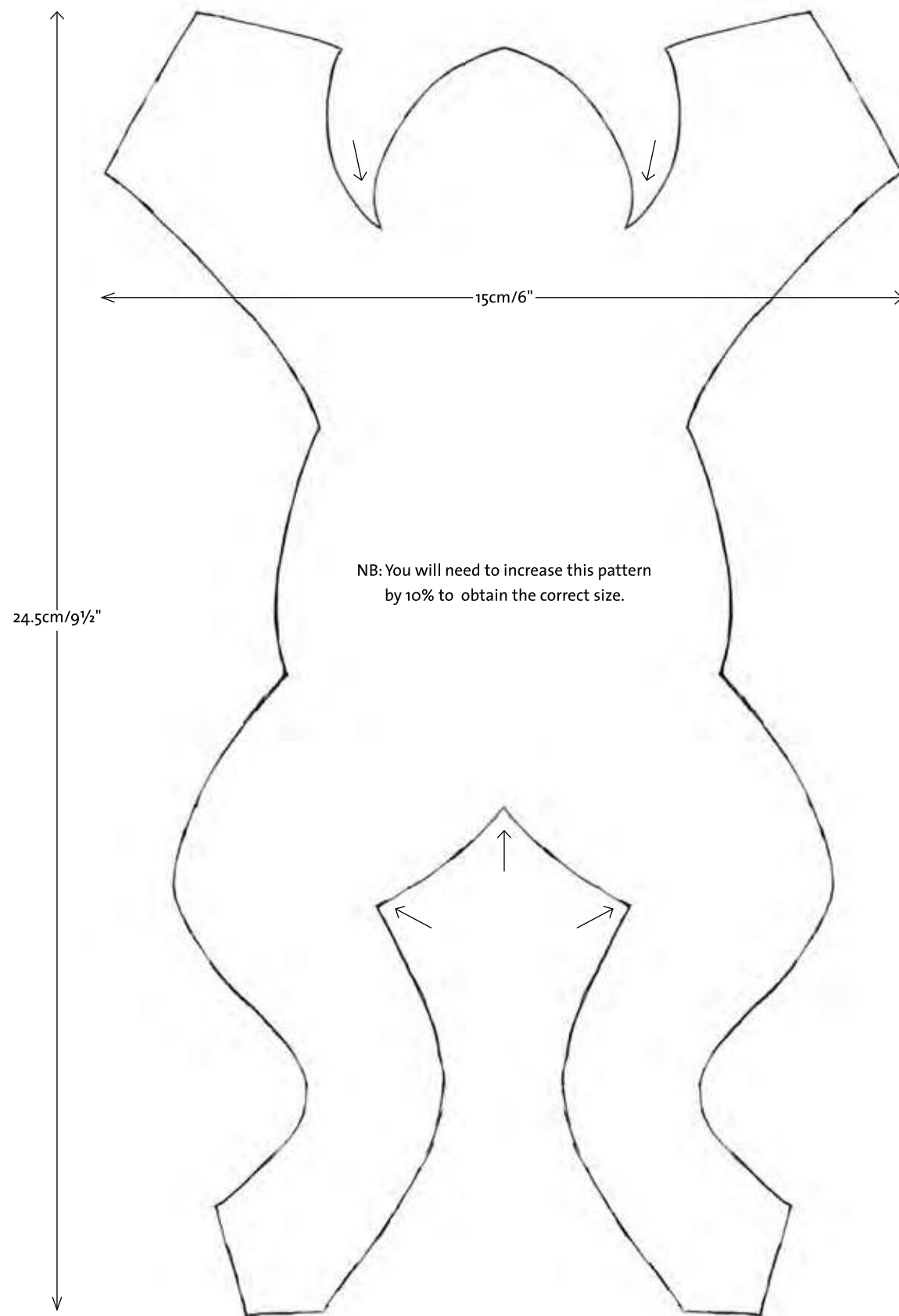
YOU WILL NEED

- Smooth cotton fabric (not thick), about 40 x 23cm/16 x 9" – it doesn't have to be a realistic colour
- 2 beads for eyes
- Dried beans or rice for stuffing, about 180gm/7oz
- Tracing paper and pencil
- Scissors
- Sewing machine or needle and thread



1. Trace the outline (shown on page 102). Cut it out to make a pattern, fold the material in half, right sides together, and pin the pattern on to one side. Cut round it to make two similar pieces.
2. Remove the pattern, tack the two pieces together (leaving a 3mm/1/8" seam), going almost right round the frog but leaving enough room to get the stuffing in.
3. Sew it, then cut towards the stitching as shown by the arrows (shown overleaf). Turn it inside out and put the stuffing in. Finish it off by hand and sew the two beads onto the head for eyes.

He is ready for the long jump!



NB: You will need to increase this pattern by 10% to obtain the correct size.

Cup 'n' Ball

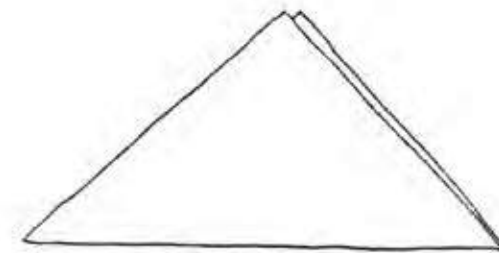
Children can easily make this paper cup themselves. It can be used for a traditional game of cup 'n' ball. It can also be a beaker if the paper is strong enough.

YOU WILL NEED

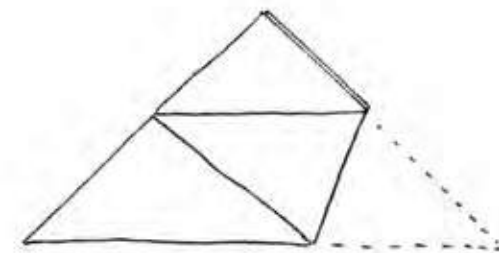
- Piece of paper, 20 x 20cm/8 x 8"
- String, about 40cm/16" long
- Darning needle
- Wooden bead, about 2cm/3/4" diameter



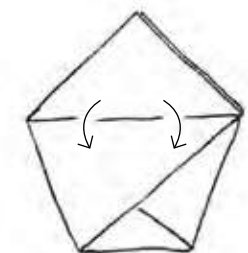
1. Fold your square of paper in half diagonally.



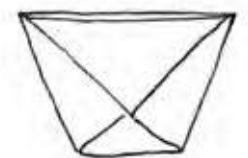
2. Fold both corners across as shown.



3. Fold down the triangles at the top, one at the front and one at the back.



4. Open the top and flatten the two main creases to form a cup shape. Fix the string to one corner by threading the string through a needle and pushing it through the paper. Tie a knot in the string inside the cup. Fix the bead at the other end of the string with a knot on each side to prevent it slipping.



Time to practise your cup tennis.

Jack in the Box

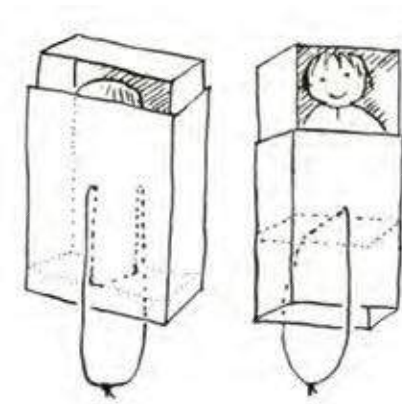
Surprise, surprise! This is an easy project.

YOU WILL NEED

- A matchbox
- Scraps of coloured paper
- Stick-on stars or dots
- Strong cotton – like button thread
- Glue
- Scissors
- Needle
- Scrap of tissue paper or plain fabric
- Little bit of sheep's fleece



5. Slide Jack's box into the cover and pull the thread – Jack comes out of the box!



1. Cover the matchbox with the coloured paper and glue the edges well. The stars and moon can be stuck onto the front and side. Line the inside of the box with coloured paper.

2. Roll the fleece into a little head shape and cover it with tissue or fabric. Tie a piece of cotton around the neck.

3. Draw on the eyes and mouth and stick some fleece on his head for hair. Glue him into the box.

4. Leave the box out of the cover then thread the cotton right through the front and the back of the cover with the needle. Tie the ends at the bottom.

