



BLOOMING MINDS

Ecotherapy At Home

For Kids

A guide to supporting children's well being through nature

MALTA
**SOCIAL
IMPACT
AWARDS**



BirdLife
MALTA



R
RICHMOND



BirdLife Malta

Established in 1962, BirdLife Malta is the oldest environmental organisation in Malta, committed to the protection of wild birds and their habitats. A non-governmental organisation (NGO), BirdLife Malta is also part of the BirdLife International network working towards conserving global biodiversity and the sustainability of natural resources.

Richmond Foundation

Founded in 1993, the Richmond Foundation is Malta's leading provider of community support for people with mental health problems. As a non-governmental, non-profit organisation, the Richmond Foundation works to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health through education and help people living with mental health problems to enjoy satisfying lives.

Social Impact Awards Malta

The Social Impact Awards is an initiative organised by The Gasan Foundation and Inspirasia Foundation. By bringing together companies and philanthropists, the initiative aims to provide Malta's changemakers with the financial and non-financial support to develop sustainable projects that have a positive social impact.

In this booklet...

You will find information about **ecotherapy**, how nature can benefit the health and development of children, how to **grow herbs and vegetables** in your garden and a step-by-step guide on how to **enjoy the great outdoors** using all of **your senses**.

WHAT IS **ECOTHERAPY?**

Ecotherapy, also known as nature therapy or green therapy, is a form of therapy that involves doing outdoor activities in nature. Spending time in green, natural spaces helps improve mental and physical health as well as increase connectivity to nature. We created this guide to help children on their ecotherapy journey with simple activities you can do at home.

WHAT IS **BLOOMING MINDS?**

Blooming Minds is an ecotherapy programme that has been created by BirdLife Malta and the Richmond Foundation to support people living with mental health problems. The programme can also be used as a preventative measure for those feeling stressed, overwhelmed or who would like to simply enhance their mental wellbeing.



How can nature benefit children's wellbeing?

Have you ever experienced being totally surrounded by nature, feeling truly at peace with yourself and your surroundings? Nature is a sensory, calming and inspiring environment.

No wonder research has demonstrated that spending time in nature can help children to develop confidence, creativity and responsibility, while reducing stress and anxiety. Exploring the natural world can really help children to develop into well-rounded, confident and mentally-healthy adults!



Improves mood



Increases motivation



Reduces ADHD symptoms



Improves physical fitness and health



Reduces feelings of stress or anger



Improves self-esteem, confidence and self-empowerment

It's OK not to be OK.

If you or a loved one, including a child, need support please visit the Richmond Foundation on www.richmond.org.mt for more information or call 1770 for help.

Everyone has their own individual experience of nature; it doesn't matter whether children are snorkelling, gardening, or walking the countryside. The important thing is that children spend a considerable proportion of their youth outside, connecting with feelings about the nature around them, appreciating the sights, smells and different textures! In this booklet, you can learn more about getting your children out into nature!



Planting for Nature



Growing fruits, vegetables and herbs is a relatively common pastime here in Malta, and for good reason! It not only provides affordable and delicious food, but is also a therapeutic activity that allows children to relax and connect with the natural world, while develop valuable skills. Growing fruits, vegetables and herbs can also help to support nature, especially pollinators such as bees!



Butterflies



Animals
that love
vegetables!



Bees



Beetles



Birds

Growing Strawberries



Materials

Strawberry seeds
Garden compost
Small and large pots

1 Plant seeds

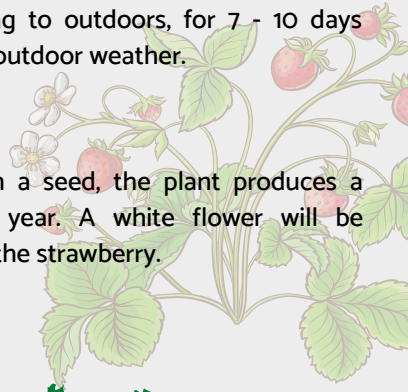
Sprinkle the seeds on top of the soil and moisten. Keep inside in a well lit area. Seeds will germinate in 2 to 4 weeks.

2 Transplanting

Move you plant gently to a bigger pot when it is 1 - 2 inches tall. If moving to outdoors, for 7 - 10 days gradually expose to outdoor weather.

3 Harvesting

When growing from a seed, the plant produces a fruit the following year. A white flower will be produced first, then the strawberry.



Growing Tomatoes

1 Sow Seeds

Sow 2-3 seeds 1/4 of an inch deep in soil.. Cover with soil and pat down. Mist with water daily for the first 7-20 days.,

2 Transfer Plants

When plant is 6 inches high, move to a bigger pot and move outside, gradually exposing them to the sun.

3 Pick Tomatoes

Fruit should appear 60 days after transplanting. Pick when fully red and ripened.



Materials

Tomato seeds
Nutrient rich soil
Small pots

Growing Basil



Materials

Basil seeds
Small yogurt pots
nutrient rich soil
bowl or something similar

1 Prep the soil

Fill your chosen container with dry soil and add water. Mix well. The moistened soil should reach roughly 1/2 to an inch from the top of the container.

2 Plant a few seeds in the pot

Once seeds are in the pot, sprinkle dry soil over them until they are at a depth that is twice their size. Moisten the top soil.

3 Pick a location

Place your seeds in a warm location and check them daily. They should sprout in 3-5 days.

Tips: Water twice a week from the bottom of the pot. Move the plants to larger pots once they are older.

Growing Thyme

1 Plant Seeds

Sprinkle the seeds on top of the soil and place a thin layer of soil on top. Water thoroughly and place in a sunny location.

2 Transplant

Seeds can take 1 to 12 weeks to sprout. Once seedlings are four inches high, plant them in a large pot or outside.

3 Exposure to the outdoors

Place your pots in partial sun for a few hours at a time, increasing a little each day. Do this for about a week.



Materials

Thyme seeds
Small pots

Tips: Thyme grows better when in poor soil and watered a little. The plant will take 1 year to establish, avoid harvesting until then.

Building a bug hotel

Invertebrates need a home too! Somewhere to shelter on a cold night, or to hide from the searing heat of the day. Construction of a bug hotel provides such a site, attracting many different minibeasts to your greenspace! If you're really lucky, mammals and reptiles may also visit!

Materials

- Wooden pallets
- Bricks or stones
- Filling material - dead wood and sticks, dry leaves, vegetation
- Dry logs
- Roof tiles, flat stones or planks of wood



Stage 1: Foundations

Place a wooden pallet on level ground and place bricks on top of it, in a H-shape.



Stage 2: Building Up

Then place your next pallet on top, followed by yet more bricks - This process can be continued until your bug hotel reaches the desired height (no more than one metre)

Stage 3: Filling the Gaps

Your bug hotel should not have lots of gaps and holes in it, and by filling these with a variety of different natural materials (grass, dead wood, dry leaves), you can provide lots of habitats for minibeasts.





Stage 5: Adding a roof

Many of your minibeast friends will hide in the hotel to shelter from the rain, so it's best to add a waterproof roof to stop rain seeping in! You can do this by adding roof tiles, planks of wood or flat stones to the top of the structure



Feel free to experiment

Bug hotels can be made in many different shapes and styles!





Sound Maps



Materials

- Circles of card or paper (your disk)
- Pencils, crayons, pens
- An outdoor space



Top Tip



Try and do this at different times of the day to see if there is a difference!

Step 1

Find a spot you can sit comfortably in and not be disturbed.



Step 2

Take a "disk" on which you are going to record the sounds around you.



Step 3

At the centre of the disk, draw yourself. Now you can close your eyes and listen.



Step 4

Every time you hear a new sound, try and work out where it is coming from and mark it on your disk.



Step 5

Each mark can be a drawing of the thing making the sound or symbol.



Step 6

Once finished, count how many sounds you heard and compare with others.

Step 7

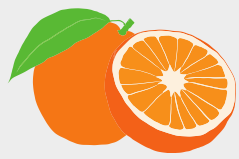
Count how many of the sounds are made from nature.



Step 8

Count how many of your sounds are man-made.



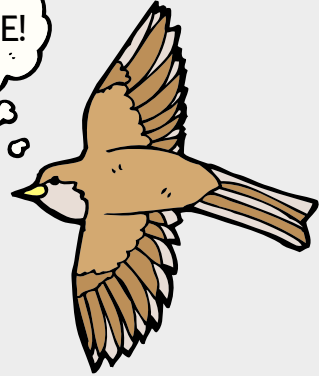


How to make an orange bird feeder



Materials needed:

- Orange - Preferably, a fresher, slightly less ripe fruit with a thick, strong rind that will make for a more durable feeder.
- Awl, paring knife or wooden skewer
- String
- Knife
- Spoon
- Birdseed (or other food birds love!)



- 1 Cut the orange in half
- 2 Use the spoon or a manual juicer to hollow out each half of the rind
- 3 Use the spoon or a manual juicer to hollow out each half of the rind
- 4 Using the awl, paring knife or skewer, create four holes around the cup of the rind - The holes should be evenly spaced and approximately a half-inch from the rind's cut edge.

7

Fill the orange cup with birdseed!

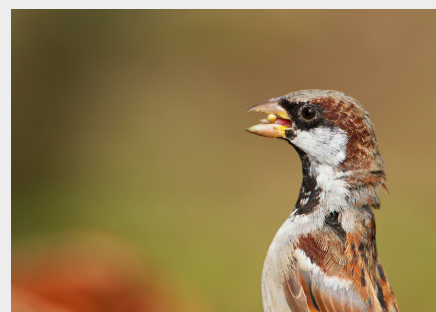
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Hang the feeder from a tree branch or hook.



- 5 Cut two lengths of string - each piece should be 18-24 inches long. Thread each string through two opposite holes, creating x-shape in the middle of the cup.

- 6 Knot the strings together at the top to create a pair of joined loops, which you can use to hang the feeder.



We hope you enjoyed our ecotherapy guide!

We would love to hear from you please contact us on
education@birdlifemalta.org
and for more top tips on ecotherapy visit our webpage
www.birdlifemalta.org/ecotherapy