

The changing seasons and their variety of hues, weather conditions and produce offer rich experiences for children as they learn about these differences. The best way to do this is to be outside and actively enjoying these changes. This set of stone leaves has been designed to be robust for use outdoors, enabling them to be compared to their natural counterparts. They can be easily and safely cleaned afterwards. The set consists of twelve leaves divided into six pairs depicting different seasonal tones.



Key vocabulary

- Apple, beech, cherry, maple, oak, and silver birch
- Leaf, leaves
- Red, green, brown, orange, yellow
- Smooth/rough
- Curve/point
- Spring, summer, autumn/fall, winter
- Season
- Tall/taller/tallest
- Small/smaller/smallest
- Wide/wider/widest
- Sort
- Compare
- Similarities
- Differences
- Different from / similar to

Activity ideas

Using the leaf stones

- By observing the tonal and tactile differences, and the range of sizes and shapes, children will benefit from a wealth of sensory feedback, as well as developing their comparing and sorting skills. They will enjoy discussing the similarities and differences between the leaves, while enriching their descriptive vocabulary.
- The leaves can be used in their upright positions as scenery for imaginary play, providing opportunities for them to be used for the development of storytelling skills.



- Explore the natural world by going on a leaf hunt, comparing the stone leaves with the real versions. Focus on the sensory experiences. Look at the tones, shapes, vein patterns. Feel the textures. Smell them. Listen to the sounds as you handle them. Gather any fallen ones for use later.
- Place some of the stone leaves in a basket of real leaves. Invite a child to find a stone leaf and try to work out which it is by feel alone. Ask them to describe what they are feeling. Extend this by asking them to find a specific stone leaf hidden in the basket, matching it to its partner.
- Make imprints of the leaves in play dough. This works in the reverse too by pressing the dough onto the stone. A good activity for learning about levels of pressure.

- Rotate a number of the dough imprints so that the children need to orientate the leaf stone to place it correctly in its imprint. A focus here is on the development of spatial awareness and fine motor skills.
- Take rubbings of the stones using wax crayons.



- Discuss why the leaf stones are in different hues depending on the season. This is a good way to explore the yearly cycle of deciduous trees. In spring, the young leaves appear as buds, which grow in to green leaves in the summer. This is due to the chlorophyll in the leaves, which helps the tree make food. During autumn/fall the leaves are no longer making any food and so they change tones, before dropping off, leaving the trees bare for winter.
- Gather and compare the seeds of the trees in the set. Each seed could be a new tree. Apple and cherry seeds are inside the fruits. If animals eat the fruit, they will later excrete the seeds elsewhere. Beech and oak seeds are found within their nuts, which are also eaten by animals. Sometimes squirrels bury acorns from oak trees to eat later. These can grow in to new trees. Maple and silver birch seeds are carried on the wind.

Create and make

- Make leaf crowns. Gather fallen leaves and glue them onto a suitable length of card. Make sure the points of the leaves are above the top edge of the card. Attach the ends of the strip together to create your crown.
- Use fallen leaves to create animal collages. An oval leaf for the body and a smaller leaf for the head. Oak leaves make good antlers, a maple leaf works as a lion's mane. Cut leaves up for smaller elements such as ears and eyes. Use a pen to draw on finer details. Build up a woodland scene by creating leaf woodland animals.



- Make insect sculptures: a leaf each for head, thorax and abdomen, plus six sticks for legs, Wings can be added.
- Thread leaves onto string or wire to create seasonal wreathes. While doing so, the children will be discussing patterning and sequencing.
- Paint a leaf. Reverse it and press it onto paper to create a leaf print.
- Place a leaf on paper and then paint from the centre outwards in different tones. Lift the leaf to reveal a negative leaf image. Try this using a spray bottle containing a mixture of paint and water.

- Stand a leaf stone in an upright position on a large sheet of paper. Take a torch and shine it at such an angle that a shadow is created. Draw round the outline. Add further outlines to create a forest of leaf shapes. Fill each leaf with seasonal tones, using the leaf stones for guidance.
- Cut out an oversized paper leaf and fill it with fallen leaves from the same tree.
- Sweep up fallen leaves and run through the pile created. Great exercise and lots of fun. Sweep them up when finished.



Games you can play

- Noughts and Crosses or Tic-tac-toe: Use some sticks to create the play grid. Ask each child to find a set of matching fallen leaves as their counters for the game. Play in the usual manner. This game is ideal for older children who also need to learn about turn taking.
- Ask each child to choose a fallen leaf, place it on one side of a table and then blow it to the other side using a straw. Stage some leaf races. Discuss what factors contribute to a winning leaf. Why did this leaf win? Where is the best place to put the straw? Is it better to blow hard or soft?

Extending the learning

- Create transient art using leaves. Collect a range of leaves and use them to make a leaf rainbow, with each arc of the rainbow a different tone. A similar collection could be used to create a mountainous landscape.
- Drip some marbling inks into a shallow tray of water. Blend the inks gently to create a pattern. Lay a sheet of paper on the surface of the water. Carefully lift it off and lay it down to dry. Once dry, cut a leaf shape from the marbled sheet.

Children's books featuring leaves

What Do You See When You Look at a Tree? by Emma Carlisle

Leaf Man by Lois Ehlert

The Leaf Thief by Alice Hemming and Nicola Slater

Leaves by Stephen Hogton

Tilly Plants a Tree by William Petty and Axel Scheffler

The Book of Trees by Piotr Socha

