

Working In Tandem With The Seasons

Paddy Madden continues with the series on SESE tips for throughout the year

December

OUTDOOR



Bird table

1 Make a bird table Use a piece of old wood about 50cm x 40cm, an old tubular steel clothes' hanger from a wardrobe and some narrow laths to construct one. Clean it and move it around regularly to practice good hygiene. See www.blackrockec.ie. Click on Projects/Resources then more projects then Paddy's School Garden

2 Make a bird bath Use an old refuse bin lid and old blocks or bricks to provide a bathing and drinking place for birds over the winter. Line the inside with cement to provide a firm footing for birds. At this time of the year they need to keep their feathers in

prime condition to ensure that they remain waterproof and to maintain warmth. Change the water regularly.

3 Stratify holly berries Unscrupulous removal of holly by the cutting down of whole trunks and boughs from trees has resulted in a scarcity of this native species. Schools can assist in its regeneration by growing *Ilex aquifolium* from seed. All that's needed are holly berries from native trees, a large flowerpot and sand and of course patience! It will take over a year for the seeds to germinate in the damp sand. See www.blackrockec.ie.

4 Continue composting This process can be extremely frustrating if the compost turns out to be a wet, slimy mass. To ensure good methodology follow the guidelines on the video 'Paddy's School Garden' on www.blackrockec.ie. It's most important that a mixture of green compost material (fruit, vegetable and plant matter) and brown compost material (rotting leaves, plant stems, shredded cardboard) be used to get the balance right. 🌱



Stratifying holly berries



Bird bath



PADDY MADDEN lectures in SESE in Coláiste Mhuire, Marino Institute of Education. The monthly articles, 'Working in tandem with the seasons', are based on the very successful course of the same name which was pioneered in Marino in 2009. This year the course will take place in the Blackrock Education Centre on one Monday every month from September to June commencing on 27 September. Enquiries to Catherine@blackrockec.ie. The Centre will also produce 5 short videos every month based on the monthly sessions. They can be downloaded from www.blackrockec.ie



INDOOR



Robin on bottle



Native holly



variegated holly

1 Study the robin The robin is one bird that is a symbol of Christmas for two reasons: (a) in mythology the robin is associated with Jesus – when he tried to pluck the thorns from his head blood splashed on his breast and remained, (b) in the 1840s the postmen in England wore red outfits and were often called, “robin redbreasts” – because they delivered post (often with gifts) on Christmas Day the robin became associated with Christmas. See www.rte.ie/radio/mooneygoeswild/. Click on ‘Factsheets’ and also on ‘Terry’s Eye on Nature’ for more information. Also click on ‘Podcasts’ to listen to an interesting recording on the robin.

2 Study the holly Holly was classified by the 8 century Laws of Neighbourhood as one of the seven ‘nobles of the wood’. These included as well oak, ash, yew, Scots pine, crab apple, hazel. It had a high ranking because it was a most useful tree for war (making chariot shafts and spears) and for feeding livestock. The fine for cutting down one of these trees was two and a half milch cows; for cutting a branch a one year old heifer; for cutting a fork a two year old heifer.

Holly was used for protection against evil spirits; the Druids used it too in their rituals. In

winter it was brought indoors so that the ‘good people’ could find shelter in it from the cold.

The word ‘holly’ comes from the word ‘holy’ and was associated with Christ’s suffering; the thorns represented his crown and the berries his dripping blood. See www.treesforlife.org.uk; www.controversial.com; www.irishculturesandcustoms.com; www.sligoheritage.com (the latter site has useful information on the holly’s association with the wrenboys).

The Irish for holly is cuileann and it is associated with many place-names such as Cullen, Coolcullen etc.

3 Study the Noble Fir and the tradition of the Christmas tree

The Noble Firs are natives of western North America and are nowadays commonly used for Christmas trees. See www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas_tree for information on this topic. 🌲



Rustic seat



Christmas tree



Strand Units covered this month: environmental awareness, caring for the environment, science and the environment, plant and animal life, materials and change, properties and characteristics of materials, feasts and festivals in the past, myths and legends.

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