Our Site

We looked at our site from a plants point of view:

What are the conditions?

Where does the sun appear in the sky in summer?

How exposed is the site to weather?

What is the soil like?

Our site has an area of mature trees around the northern perimeter, which shelter an open boggy area from prevailing winds. This open area is in a
fairly sunny position facing south, but the soil is prone to waterlogging with acid conditions.

Originally, we planned to under-plant the mature trees with edible fruit plants for the children to pick as they were playing. However upon a closer look, we felt it would be better to leave the small piece of woodland to be a wild play area, and plant other fruit trees and bushes around the site where they would get more sunshine and we could create better soil.

**Planting Ideas**

Our committee got together, our plants needed to be the following:

- edible
- perennial (ie permanent not annuals that would only live for one season)
- safe/appropriate for a children’s play area.

We also wanted our plants to be, if possible:

- fun and interesting to children
- low maintenance
- thornless (so as to be safe for little fingers)
- sourced locally and to be a local variety
- fairly hardy (to cope with wet weather, frost, soil conditions)

**Choosing and ordering plants**

We shopped around, to get an idea of how much things cost before committing ourselves – we found that some companies offered discounts for bulk buying, and we found people were often generous when we explained our project.
We looked at the site together, to plan and discuss where to put things. This was when we came up with the idea of making raised beds at one end of the site, to enhance an area of existing benches that were in regular use.

It would have been nice to plant low growing aromatic herbs, such as camomile or lemon thyme, around the benches to release a nice fragrance when walked on, but the soil was just too boggy for herbs to survive. So the idea of a raised herb bed was suggested, which would also allow the children to sow seeds such as parsley, and edible flowers such as nasturtians, which are fun and colourful. On the site were a couple of old discarded car and tractor tyres, we used these as our planters.

Buying fruit trees as ‘bare rooted’ is the cheapest option - that means the plant is delivered with no soil around it roots - but means they have to be planted as soon as possible, in the dormant season, late winter. We organised a Group Activity/Event day, so we were able to prepare the ground ready for our local fruit stockists to deliver.

**The plants we choose:**

- Strawberries (3 varieties, chosen for continuous cropping throughout the summer, disease resistant and good in wet conditions)
- Blackcurrants
- Chuckleberries (for the name!)
- Gooseberries
- Redcurrants
- Apples (variety of ‘cookers’ and ‘eaters’)
- Pear (chosen due its being discovered growing on Mount Snowdon, therefore having a local interest for us and assuming it will be tolerant to our weather)
- Damson
- Plum

We discussed having raspberries, but then decided against, as besides them needing a lot of maintenance with taking over ground, there are already a lot of wild raspberries nearby to our site.
Suppliers we used:

- Ian Sturrock 01248 371573 – suppliers of fruit trees, specialising in Welsh varieties
- Welsh Fruit Stocks www.welshfruitstocks.co.uk – soft fruits, currants and berries.
- Dyfi Bridge Nursery, Machynlleth – a local company supplying herbs

Our Activity/Event Days

Our Group Activity/Event days were planned for the winter months when it is better for planting trees.

As well as the actual planting, we also had some outdoor activities for children, based around the theme of plants and nature.

Our goal:

- To plant trees and fruit bushes successfully
- To have fun with the space
- To educate about plant requirements (roots, stem, leaves)
- To instruct on safe tool use

Resources/materials:

- Tools (spades, forks, wheelbarrows – children sized as well as adult)
- Paper and pens
- Wildlife books (we got some from the library)
- Worksheets
Activities:

- Name different parts of a tree – trunk, roots, bark, etc
- Touch and feel bark, twigs, leaves, look for fruit buds
- Measure around the tree and record the circumference, and compare each year, to see if tree is growing
- Name different fruits and nuts that come from trees
- What else can a tree be used for?
- What can we do with our fruit?
- What animals might use a tree for a home?
- Look for insects under the bark, what can you find?
- What other animals might live in the tree (think of birds, eating insects – ecosystem)
- What kind of tree can you imagine. Draw a picture of your favourite tree
- Foraging game – list items and ask children to hunt around the site to see if they can find them
- What sounds can you hear?
- What smells can you smell?
- Garden sculptures – see what you can make using only materials found around the site, e.g. make a face with grass for hair, twigs for mouth, or make a pixie home.
Our raised herb bed, just planted!