

BEALTAINÉ LIVING EARTH FESTIVAL

Early Childhood Activity Book



Bealtaine Living Earth Festival

The Bealtaine Living Earth Festival offers a rich and meaningful opportunity to engage children with the living world at a time of seasonal renewal and growth. Rooted in Ireland's cultural heritage, Bealtaine celebrates plants, water, pollinators and biodiversity, making it a natural and powerful context for early learning.

This leaflet presents a collection of play-based STEAM activities that support early childhood settings to engage with the Bealtaine festival. The activities are inspired by the festival's key focus days:

- Fascination with Plants Day
- European Maritime Day
- World Bee Day
- UN International Day for Biological Diversity

The activities are designed for young children using simple, accessible and mostly natural materials and are aligned with the Aistear curriculum framework's focus on supporting children to develop an understanding of sustainability and to become agentic global citizens of the world. They reflect Aistear's view of children as active, capable learners who construct understanding through play, relationships and meaningful experiences.

Across the activities, children:

- Explore the natural world through hands-on investigation
- Communicate ideas, predictions and discoveries
- Collaborate with peers and adults
- Develop a sense of belonging to their environment

Whether planting seeds, building boats, role-playing pollinators or creating habitats, children engage with scientific and engineering ideas in developmentally appropriate ways. These experiences help build positive dispositions towards education for sustainability. Through simple actions like watering plants, protecting pollinators, creating habitats, children begin to understand that they are part of the living world, and that caring actions matter.

Participating in the Bealtaine Living Earth Festival enables early childhood settings to:

- Embed Aistear-aligned learning in a seasonal, cultural context.
- Strengthen STEAM practice through play and inquiry.
- Lay strong foundations for sustainability education.
- Nurture children's wonder, curiosity and care for the living Earth.

Bealtaine invites educators and children to slow down, notice, explore and celebrate the world around them, turning everyday moments of play into meaningful learning experiences.

ACTIVITY:

SEED EXPLORERS LAB

FASCINATION WITH
PLANTS DAY
MAY 18TH

What you need:

- Beans, peas, herbs or lettuce seeds
- Reused yoghurt pots / egg cartons
- Soil or compost
- Water spray bottles
- Magnifying glasses



What the children do:

- Plant seeds and observe them over time.
- Predict what will happen (“What do you think will grow first?”).
- Measure growth using blocks, string, rulers.
- Photograph your seeds at different stages of growth.

Benefits for Children’s Learning & Development:

Encourages fascination and wonder with plant life through first-hand experience and fosters empathy for the natural world and sustainability concepts.

Builds early scientific thinking and numeracy: observing change, sequencing and cause-and-effect, measurement.

ACTIVITY: NATURE MANDALA

FASCINATION WITH
PLANTS DAY
MAY 18TH

What you need:

- Leaves, petals, grass, twigs, flowers, shells, stones
- Large circle drawn on cardboard or ground
- Glue (optional if using cardboard)



What the children do:

- Create nature based art.
- Arrange natural materials in repeating patterns and shapes.
- Sort by colour, size or texture.

Benefits for Children's Learning & Development:

Reflects plant diversity, symmetry and pattern, key botanical concepts. Fosters an appreciation of the beauty of nature and the natural world.

Builds creativity, fine motor skills and early numeracy: patterns, symmetry, sorting, grouping materials.

ACTIVITY: MINI BOAT BUILDERS

EUROPEAN
MARITIME DAY
MAY 20TH

What you need:

- Corks, foil, cardboard, bottle tops, tubs
- Sticks or straws
- Basin of water / outdoor water tray

What the children do:

- Design and build boats.
- Test which float, sink or travel fastest.
- Modify designs after testing.



Benefits for Children's Learning & Development:

Introduces children to basic maritime principles (buoyancy, design) in a playful way. Supports the aims of European Maritime Day to raise awareness of seas and human connections to them. Further build upon this by discussing the role of humans to care for our oceans and the sea creatures who live there.

Builds empathy with ocean life and an awareness of the importance of sustainability linked to the ocean. Builds design thinking, creativity and engineering concepts in addition to scientific concepts related to floating and sinking.

ACTIVITY: POLLINATION GAME BEES AT WORK



What you need:

- Yellow pom-poms (pollen)
- Cut out of paper flowers or real flowers
- Tweezers or fingers (print small pictures of bees and attach to tweezers)

What the children do:

- Move “pollen” between flowers.
- Count how many flowers are “pollinated”.
- Discuss what bees help plants do.

Benefits for Children’s Learning & Development:

Demonstrates the role of bees in ecosystems through play. Closely matches World Bee Day goals of awareness and protection of pollinators. Supports the development of empathy with bees and their role in nature.

Builds fine motor skills and early numeracy through counting.

ACTIVITY: LIVING THINGS SORTING LAB

UN INTERNATIONAL
DAY FOR
BIOLOGICAL
DIVERSITY
MAY 22ND

What you need:

- Picture cards or small toys of animals, insects, plants
- Hoops or trays

What the children do:

- Sort by habitat (land, water, air).
- Group by size, wings, leaves, colours.
- Talk about why living things need different homes.



Benefits for Children's Learning & Development:

Builds the foundation of biodiversity understanding: observing similarities, difference, connection, habitats and caring for nature. Develops scientific thinking and an understanding of the natural world and living creatures. Develops early numeracy: sorting, grouping, categorising, counting characteristics such as spots, wings, legs. Colour recognition.

ACTIVITY: BUILD A HABITAT

UN INTERNATIONAL
DAY FOR
BIOLOGICAL
DIVERSITY
MAY 22ND

What you need:

- Recycled boxes
- Natural materials (leaves, stones, grass, moss, flowers, twigs)
- Paper and crayons
- Pictures of real animal habitats



What the children do:

- Design and create homes for animals or insects.
- Explain choices (“Why does this animal need water?”)

Benefits for Children’s Learning & Development:

Highlights interdependence between living things and their environments, central to biodiversity and sustainability education. Promotes imagination, creativity and design thinking linked to engineering concepts such as building and construction. Fosters critical thinking as children think about their choice of design and how it meets the need of their chosen creature. Encourages children to develop empathy and awareness and the importance of caring for and protecting animal habitats.

This booklet was developed by Paula Walshe PhD researcher on STEAM in early childhood education and lecturer at SETU Carlow, in conjunction with Calmast STEM Engagement Centre.

