

GREEN INHERITANCE WORKSHOPS

WWF Green Inheritance Education Pack

In 1990, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF UK) Education Department commissioned Ian Edwards and Karen McDonald of the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh to write an education pack which would encourage school use of botanic gardens. The pack would be aimed at 9 - 13 year olds and have a strong conservation emphasis.

The resulting resource is based on the excellent book by Anthony Huxley, called *Green Inheritance*, which provides teachers and students with much factual information about plants, their habitats, cultural value and uses. Working from this the authors produced teachers' notes, resource lists and activity sheets for use in the classroom and during class visits to a botanic garden or arboreta. Thirty-seven activities span the eleven subject areas covered in the book, namely: plant diversity, environmental protection, plant dispersal, staple foodstuffs, luxury foods and cosmetics, industrial uses of plants, natural medicines, aesthetic uses of plants, ethnobotany, genetic resources and plant conservation.

Other items in the pack include a set of black and white photographs showing the wide range of everyday plant uses and a colour wall chart illustrating the main vegetation zones in the world and a selection of threatened plant species. The workshops at the Natural Environment for Learning conference included a demonstration of two activities from the pack: *The Chinese Herbalist* at the KNVB Sportscenter Utrecht (Activity 7.2) and *Ring o'Roses* at Leiden Botanic Garden (Activity 5.4). Since the Conference the pack has been used as the basis of in service training for some UK primary and secondary school teachers.

The Chinese Herbalist

This activity demonstrates the traditional use of eight important herbs in Chinese medicine. The objectives is to explore connections between living plants, medicinal products derived from them and conditions for which they are applied. It also enables participants to experience the texture, taste and smell of different herbs and spices. It follows an activity which introduces the idea of preventative and curative medicine.



CHINESE HERBAL
BENCAO

有
毒
中
草
藥

COMPLAINT

SEA SICKNESS
TIREDNESS
COUGH
STOMACH ACHE
SPRAINS
FLATULENCE (FARTING)
TOOTHACHE
RHEUMATISM

CURE

CINNAMON
TEA
CORIANDER
FENNEL
WITCH HAZEL
GINGER
CLOVES (or STAR ANISE)
CAMPHOR



Like many activities in the pack, the Chinese Herbalist involves an element of fantasy. In this case the class imagine they are on a school visit to China when several members fall sick. Fortunately they have with them a Chinese herbalist (usually played by the class teacher or another adult) but unfortunately she does not speak any English. The children have to mime their complaint which generally causes much hilarity. Once the herbalist has diagnosed the problem and consulted her herbal

bencao (see illustration) she leads the group to the plant or, if the activity is carried out indoors, finds the appropriate herb or spice on the dusty shelves of the Herbalist Shop. In some cases preparation of the material can be demonstrated, eg: coriander or fennel seeds can be ground; ginger grated or tea infused with hot water.

Although at Utrecht the activity took place entirely indoors, ideally there should be an opportunity to visit and see the living plants in a botanic garden collection. The plants become much more interesting when the participants have discovered their properties.

Ring O'Roses

This activity involves exploring non-visual senses, especially touch and smell. It was designed for use in outside areas of a botanic garden but due to the very wet weather on the day of our visit to Leiden Botanic Garden the activity took place with equal success in a tropical planthouse.

Half the group lay a trail through a small area of garden using a ball of string to connect plants which provide interesting textures, smells or tastes. The other half of the group are blindfolded. Blindfolded participants are given a "sighted" partner from the first half of the group who lead them carefully around the trail. Instructions such as "smell the flower by your knees" or "rub the smooth bark by your left hand" are used to encourage the blind partners to get the most from the experience. Working together the partners also develop a dependence which involves trust.

In the planthouses at Leiden even experienced botanists were surprised by some of the interesting smells and textures they discovered among familiar plants. This opportunity to open up to different sensations has hopefully helped them to develop new ideas to interpret their own collections.

Reference

Edwards ID & McDonald K, 1991. *Green Inheritance Education Pack* (including *Green Inheritance* by Anthony Huxley) WWF Education Distribution, PO Box 963, Slough, SL2 3RS, UK
(Cost £19.95 + £4.00 p & p)

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