

Community of Practice Tip Sheet

Pinecones and Conkers Nature Toys



Early Years Teachers have long embraced the challenge of incorporating natural materials into learning experiences in ways that engage and inspire children, while also being mindful of the diverse backgrounds in their settings. Another consideration for many educators is how to integrate these materials sustainably and meaningfully into everyday activities, ensuring that learning remains both playful and purposeful.

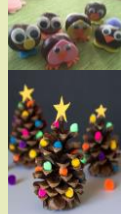
Fortunately, some of the creative participants from our LINC+ CPD Community of Practice are eager to share their inclusive and thoughtful approaches to using natural materials in their settings, fostering curiosity and respect for the natural world among all children.

Nature Science and Exploration

Conker Float or Sink Experiment: Explore buoyancy by placing conkers in water to see if they float or sink, and discuss why.
Counting and Sorting: Use conkers and pinecones for counting, sorting by size, or creating simple patterns.
Pinecone Life Cycle: Study the structure of pinecones and talk about their role in tree reproduction, including collecting seeds from inside.

Outdoor Play

Conker Hunt: Organize a conker scavenger hunt outdoors, helping children find, collect, and count their treasures.
Pinecone Toss: Set up a target and have children toss pinecones into baskets, working on coordination and aiming skills.
Conker Balance Challenge: Create a balance beam using wood or rope and have children try to walk across while balancing conkers on spoons.
Creative Play and Storytelling
Conker People: Create little figures using conkers, toothpicks, and other natural materials, encouraging imaginative storytelling.
Pinecone Fairy Houses: Use pinecones, leaves, and twigs to build tiny fairy houses or woodland scenes, sparking creativity.



Sensory Play

Conker and Pinecone Sensory Bin: Create a sensory bin filled with conkers, pinecones, leaves, and other autumnal items for children to explore textures, sounds, and shapes.

Rolling Conkers: Roll conkers down a ramp or a piece of cardboard and see how far they go, exploring motion and physics in a playful way.

Scented Pinecones: Add natural scents like cinnamon or lavender to pinecones for a sensory smell experience.

Art and Craft

Conker Painting: Dip conkers in paint and roll them on paper to create unique marble-effect art pieces.

Pinecone Animals: Use pinecones, googly eyes, and craft materials to create woodland animals like owls or hedgehogs.

Conker Stringing: Help children string conkers onto yarn to make natural garlands or necklaces, building fine motor skills.

Pinecone Stamping: Dip pinecones in paint and use them as stamps to create textured patterns on paper.



Mathematical Learning

Conker Measuring: Measure items using conkers as non-standard units. For example, how many conkers long is the table?
Conker and Pinecone Patterning: Arrange conkers and pinecones in alternating patterns, encouraging children to recognize and continue patterns.

Music and Movement

Conker Shakers: Fill small containers with conkers and use them as musical shakers to explore rhythm and sound.
Pinecone Dancing: Attach pinecones to ribbons or strings and let children dance around with them, adding movement to play.
Problem Solving and STEM
Conker Towers: Challenge children to build towers or structures using conkers and sticks, exploring balance, gravity, and engineering concepts.



Involving Parents/Guardians

Involve parents by encouraging them to collect conkers and pinecones with their children during nature walks, fostering home-school connections and promoting shared learning experiences.



- **Well-being:** Activities like sensory bins, pinecone toss, and conker balance challenge support physical development, coordination, and emotional regulation.
- **Exploring and Thinking:** Experiments, counting, and building with conkers and pinecones foster early STEM learning, problem-solving, and curiosity about the natural world.
- **Communicating:** Crafting animals, conker painting, and storytelling with conker people encourage language development, creativity, and self-expression.
- **Identity and Belonging:** Group activities such as conker hunts and fairy house building promote social interaction and a sense of belonging.

Additional Learning Opportunities

Literacy Development: Encourage children to describe or write simple stories about their conker and pinecone creations, enhancing vocabulary and storytelling skills.
Math Skills: Introduce simple counting and sorting games using conkers and pinecones, helping children develop basic numeracy skills like addition, subtraction, and pattern recognition.

Created Collaboratively for LINC+ CPD by LINC+CPD Participants; Jackie Finney, Sally Hartnett & Angela Williamson.

If you would like to contribute to our LINC+ CPD Resources please contact lincCPD@mic.ul.ie or join our Community of Practice sessions Wednesdays at 7.00pm