



Find that Nut!

Obtain some nuts. In the autumn you will find Hazel and Beech nuts particularly and children can collect them

Did you know?

Squirrels are rodents and rodents are very good at 'squirreling away' food for when times are hard. Other rodents such as water voles store bulbs, roots and shoots in chambers in their burrows - particularly in mid winter when there is little cover above ground and they could get spotted and eaten when above ground! Beavers store twigs and branches in their lodges. When the water around their lodge freezes and they can't get out, they will still have food supplies. Wood mice store seeds and other food in specially dug chambers near to their nest chamber, deep inside their burrow system.

Before the activity

Discuss why we store food and how we store food (cupboards, packets, tins, freezer, dried food, etc.). Ask if the class can think of any animals that store food. They might come up with suggestions such as bees, squirrels, rooks, jays, and dogs (foxes bury excess voles and mice and even dogs bury bones).

The activity

Go for a walk through a piece of woodland. Show them how a squirrel would bury a nut to 'cache' it for future use. It's called scatter hoarding. They dig a little hole and bury one or two nuts and then plug the hole with moss, grass and soil. Discuss with the children why they think that a squirrel doesn't place all its cache of food in one place? Why do squirrels need to store food anyway? When do most trees produce seed?



Explain to the children that they are to become 'squirrels'. Along a section of the woodland path, give the children a few nuts each to hide anywhere they like between 2 points. On the way back see if the children can find their hidden caches. Did they manage to find all their nuts? Did they find anyone else's by accident? The squirrel doesn't seem to remember exactly where they hide every nut, but they seem to remember the general area where they stored a lot of nuts, and search for them using their sense of smell too!

Trees help squirrels by providing them with food, how do the squirrels help the trees? Discuss what happens to the nuts which the squirrels bury but don't manage to find again. Discuss how far an acorn gets from the parent tree when it falls to the ground, how far does it get with the help of squirrels or a rook or a jay or a wood mouse? Is a nut more likely to be eaten by birds and other animals like mice and badgers when it is lying on top of the ground or buried?

Suggested Follow up

Discuss other methods animals use to get through winter (e.g. store food as body fat, migrate, hibernate, grow a thicker winter coat).