

SECOND NATURE

SEASON OF STICKS

By Ellen Peters,
BEEC Naturalist Educator
Photos courtesy of BEEC



What's brown and sticky and you find it in the woods? A stick! It's stick season in New England. Some folks don't enjoy stick season like I do, but it's quiet, the tourists have all gone home, the skiers haven't arrived yet and there are plenty of nice days to get out and enjoy those sticks!

*My day was pretty rotten
So I took a little walk.
I'd had enough of people
Of their problems and their talk.
I went up to the woodlands
And my mood turned round real quick.
Cause just after a bit of time
I found this awesome stick!*
By A. Harris

We all know how important it is to make connections with nature and model for your children the wonders of nature. It's also important to get active and be mindful. But first you need to get out there! You can find sticks anywhere! When you do, there are countless things you can do with them.

Probably one of the most engaging stick projects is building a shelter. You can either build a mini shelter or a fairy house, or one large enough to fit your whole family! Scout around for a tree with a "Y" trunk maybe 10 feet up. Find a large "backbone" stick to tuck into that Y trunk. Once you have that foundation all you need are lots of "ribs" along each side to construct a tent shaped shelter. After you get the ribs set, you can stuff the cracks with leaf debris from the forest floor.

There is a lot of it this time of year! Fallen pine branches with needles still attached make for great finishing touches. Have yourselves a picnic inside when through!

Finding the perfect walking stick can be an adventure in itself. Finding a stick that is just the right size, the right feel, can be fun. Once you find it you can peel off the bark, and plan to make it your own. You could wrap it with nature found decorations or add a bit of yarn wrapped around with some "treasures" attached, such as pine cones, smaller sticks, feathers or hemlock branches. You could do the same with a smaller stick and call it a wizard or fairy wand.

If you brought along a small saw, you could cut yourself some "tree cookies". A small birch branch is perfect for this project. There's lots of things to do with tree cookies! Put 3 together for a

snowman ornament. Drill small holes to attach the cookies with twine. Decorate with markers. Make a name tag with a tree cookie.

How about a stick family? Find some sticks that have a Y shape, perhaps 6-12 inches long. The Y will be the legs. Attach a straight stick across the Y stick with

twine or yarn, this will be the arms.

You don't really need a head if you make a face right on the top of the stick, maybe even some little wiggly eyes? Although an old apple might make a funny head! Hair could be pine needles or moss. You could make clothes by wrapping the stick with yarn to look like a shirt or skirt or pants. Maybe even build your stick family a little shelter?!

Remember making "God's Eyes" when you were a kid? They can be traced back to the 15th century! Find two sticks or

twigs and make a plus sign securing the center by tying yarn with a long tail. Wind the yarn around each stick once and keep winding around and around until you are happy with the size. It's fun to change colors. These can be hung for decoration. (Maybe in your shelter?)

"Y sticks" are also great for weaving. Secure yarn by wrapping once around one side of the stick to the other starting at the bottom of the Y and holding onto the "handle" which is the straight part. Once you have filled that Y up with yarn back and forth, you can find treasures to weave into the yarn, feathers, sticks, leaves, mosses, ferns, bark or other found objects.

With the holidays not far away, consider creating some twig ornaments and decorations. You could secure 5 twigs to make a star shape. A tree could be constructed with sticks in descending order of size glued down a "trunk" with a twine loop at the top for hanging. Secure four sticks at the corners to make a frame for a piece of art. If you paint twigs white and secure three of them in the center it looks like a snowflake. A dusting of glitter would really make them sparkle! You can create a stick mobile by hanging different sizes and shaped twigs from a longer stick. Find a small jar and glue the same size twigs all around it, wrap with a bow of twine and put a little votive in the jar.

Money may not grow on trees, but plenty of craft supplies do! So don your warm clothing and get outside to create memories and magical treasures with sticks!

Second Nature is submitted by the naturalists at Bonnyvale Environmental Education Center (BEEC) in West Brattleboro. BEEC invites you to join us at upcoming family and youth programs exploring stick season. To learn more and to register, visit www.BEEC.org or call 802-257-5785.

