

PACEMAT

Wherever you choose to picnic you'll be in touch with nature but trying to get the whole family interested in the natural world can sometimes be tricky. If you're looking for a few fun learning activities to entertain and educate your family, you've come to the right place. We have some nature-related picnic games to keep the youngsters amused. Who knows, whilst they play you might even get a glimpse of that rare natural phenomenon – a bit of peace and quiet.

UNDER 5s

Mini Beasties

Fun fact: Snails eyes are on long stalks, and worms don't have any eyes at all

Game: Beastie Impressions

Agree on the movements for four different animals then use these movements to race once around the mat each time an animal is called. Finish each turn by sitting on that animal on the mat. For example:



Ant – scurry on your hands and feet

Snail – slither along on your tummy

Squirrel – collect something tasty then run

Caterpillar – turn into a butterfly and fly

Story Corner

Fun fact: Foxy-Loxy, Henny-Penny and Ducky-Lucky are all animals in the children's story Chicken Licken. Wormy-Squirmy and Anty-Banty aren't.

Game: Story Noises

Tell a story set in a natural setting. Explain that every time you mention some creatures or things, the listeners have to repeat certain words three times. You'll probably need a rehearsal before the story starts. For example:

Once upon a time there was a house. This wasn't an ordinary house; it was built high up in a tree ('leaf, leaf, leaf'). Inside the house lived a boy, a girl and a squirrel ('nuts, nuts, nuts'). One day the boy and girl went out for a walk to find some conkers, and they left the squirrel ('nuts, nuts, nuts') looking after the house. The squirrel ('nuts, nuts, nuts') was a naughty squirrel ('nuts, nuts, nuts') and he decided to have a party. He invited a spider ('spin, spin, spin')...





Leaf-Tastic

Fun fact: If you were a tree, losing your leaves in autumn would be like going to bed for the whole winter.

Game: Under-Leaf

Each player finds the biggest leaf they can then sits down on the mat with it. Taking it in turns they describe a creature that is 'hiding' under the leaf using the three categories, colour, legs and noise. The first player to guess what the creature is gets a turn to give a description. For really young children limit the descriptions to just the colour or sound. For example:

'Grey, 14, click-click-click' (woodlouse)
'Black, 2, caw-caw' (crow)



The Flight of the Ladybird

Fun fact: Ladybirds are actually a type of beetle and some of them are boys.

Game: Fly Away Home

This is a version of Simon Says. The caller gives instructions using the phrase 'Mrs Ladybird says'. These could include things like 'sit down', 'jump on the spot' or 'nod your head'. When Mrs Ladybird says, 'Fly away home', the players have to run three times around the mat then pretend to fall asleep on it. Just like in Simon Says, the trick here is to try to catch the players out with an instruction that doesn't mention Mrs Ladybird.

UNDER 11s

Wild Mushrooms

Fun fact: Mushrooms and trees can sometimes be good friends. Trees give mushrooms carbohydrates, and mushrooms help keep trees moist. We call this symbiosis.

Game: There's not mushroom on here!

Players stand in a line a couple of metres away from the mat. They take it in turn to call out an item on the mat, and everyone has to rush over and stand so that at least one foot is touching the item. There's one exception to the rule, if 'mushroom' is called everybody must stay off the mat and point at the mushroom. Anyone who forgets this rule and steps on the mat is out.





Nature's Bounty

Fun fact: Urban (town) habitats are just as important for nature as countryside ones. You can encourage wildlife into your garden by letting the grass grow longer, feeding the birds, and building insect hotels.

Game: Nature trail

Players take it in turns to tell the nature trail story. Starting with, 'I went on a nature trail, and I found' each adds their own item to the list then recites all the previous items. For a harder game add a place name with the same initial letter. For example:

- Player 1: *I went on a nature trail, and I found an acorn in Acton.*
Player 2: *I went on a nature trail, and I found a buttercup in Birmingham and an acorn in Acton.*
Player 3: *I went on a nature trail, and I found a spider in Sheffield, a buttercup in Birmingham and an acorn in Acton...*



Snail Trails

Fun fact: Did you know that snails use their slimy trails to communicate with each other?

Game: Snail Whispers

Stand in a line one behind the other. The person at the back of the line uses their finger to draw one of the nature pictures from the mat on the back of the person in front of them. This message is repeated in the same way down the line. When the person at the front of the line receives the 'message', they have to point to the correct picture on the mat.

Bee Hive Yourself

Fun fact: Bees all have their own specialist jobs to do. Researchers have found out that some of them are even good at maths!

Game: Buzzy Bee

Starting at one, with each player saying one number, take it in turns to count upwards. Every time you come to a number that can be divided by three replace it with the word 'buzz'. Each time you come to a number that can be divided by five, replace it with the word 'bee'. The fun comes when you get up to fifteen, which can be divided by both. Then you need to say 'buzzy bee'.

If a player gets it wrong they have to 'fly' round like a bee until the next person makes a mistake.



One, Two, Buzz, Four, Bee, Buzz, Seven, Eight, Buzz, Bee, Eleven, Buzz, Thirteen, Fourteen, Buzzy Bee...



Habitat Happenings

Fun fact: Nature can exist in all kinds of strange places. Sometimes a creature's name gives a clue to its habitat. Sea squirts, field voles and even hedgehogs are great examples of this.

Game: Happy Habitats

This is a version of the game Twister. Players take it in turns to be the caller and shout out different habitats together with a part of the body. The other players have to put that part of the body onto something on the picnic mat that can be found in that habitat. For example:

Right hand - deciduous forest (leaves, acorn, squirrel etc.)
Left foot - under a log (worm, spider, woodlouse etc.)
Nose - in the hedgerow (cow parsley, dock leaf, hazel leaf etc.)



Trail Tracking

Fun fact: Badgers and otters both have five toes but you can tell a badger print by its long claw marks (otters have webbed toes).

Game: Nature's Way

Take it in turns to use sticks and stones to mark out a nature trail for other members of the family. Give them a list of things to look out for along your route, and award them points as they find them. Only use sticks from the floor and don't move big stones. Example trail clues include:

- Arrows (this way)
- Crosses (not this way)
- Circles (return to mat)

