

The huge variety of shapes, sizes and colours in the flowers around us makes them naturally appealing to children, as well as being just right for small hands to explore! These sensory flower tiles build on children's knowledge of the natural world by encouraging them to observe closely the different shapes and patterns in various wildflowers. Made from wood, the tiles are both tactile and open-ended, ideal for use alongside other natural materials.

### Useful vocabulary

- Bluebell, buttercup, daisy, poppy, snowdrop, violet
- Stem, petal
- Long, thin, wide, pointed, smooth
- Similar, different, same, identical
- Bee, butterfly, pollinate

### Flower pairs

Use the tiles to play a Pelmanism matching game. Paying close attention in order to notice small differences is a pre-reading skill, as it prepares children to spot differences between letter shapes:

- Turn all the tiles face down on a flat surface and mix them. For younger children, using fewer tiles (such as four pairs), or arranging the tiles in a grid layout makes the game easier. Laying the tiles in a random arrangement will increase the challenge.
- The first player turns over two tiles – if they show the same flower, the player keeps the matching pair. If they are different, turn them back over in the same place as before, encouraging children to remember what they were.
- Take turns to turn two tiles over, encouraging children to wait patiently for their own turn.
- Continue until all the pairs have been discovered, then count how many tiles each player has – the winner has the most tiles.

### More tile games

- Snap: Two players each have a pile of tiles turned face down. Take turns to turn over the top tile and place it face up, creating a new pile each. If the top tiles on both players' piles are a matching pair, the first player to shout 'Snap!' wins the pair. Continue until all the pairs have been found, turning the pile of face-up tiles over to reuse when the face-down pile is finished.
- Matching flowers: Find some real flowers that are the same varieties as some of the flowers shown on the tiles. Place these in a bag or box and put the tiles face-up on a surface. Ask a child to carefully take a flower out of the bag or box and look for a tile showing the same variety of flower. This may generate some discussion due to the natural variation in individual flowers.
- For a sensory challenge, place two tiles face up and in the same orientation under a cloth so they can't be seen. Ask a child to put their hands under the cloth and feel the two tiles. (Alternatively, you could ask them to close their eyes or use a blindfold.) Do the two tiles feel the same or different?



# Flower talk

Talk about the flower tiles to build on children's existing knowledge of the natural world:

- What do the children notice about the shape of the flowers? What do the flower shapes feel like? Looking at two tiles, such as the daisy and the violet, which has more petals? Can the children count them? Which flowers hang downwards? Do the children know what colour each flower is? There might be clue in the names 'bluebell', 'snowdrop' and 'buttercup'!
- The flowers on the tiles are all wildflowers – have the children seen them growing anywhere? There might even be some in and around your setting. You could talk about how some of the flowers are fine to pick (such as daisies and buttercups), but others should be left for the bees to visit and for other people to enjoy.
- These flowers appear at different times of the year. When do the children think the snowdrop might flower? Which flowers come out in the springtime?
- Talk about how insects collect nectar to eat from the flowers around us. Can the children spot any insects visiting flowers nearby? Talk about the flower shapes and which insects might visit the flowers – which insects could crawl inside, or which could land on the flowers?



# Flower detectives

- Create a flower investigation area on a table or tray: include the tiles alongside some real and artificial flowers, as well as leaves and coloured cups for sorting the flowers. Provide magnifying glasses and paper for children to record what they see. Books and posters will encourage children to find out more.
- Plant some wildflowers in your outdoor area – this could be in pots if space is limited. Use the tiles as labels or to help identify the flowers that grow.
- A springtime nature walk is a great opportunity for children to spot flowers around them. They may be able to pick some wildflowers to take back to the setting. Use the tiles to help identify the flowers and record your finds.
- The tiles are ideal for taking rubbings, using a wax crayon and paper. As well as promoting fine motor skills, children learn about how much pressure to apply to create the clearest rubbing possible. Children could cut their rubbings out and stick them onto a grassy background.



# Flower play

The tiles can be added to various play areas for children to explore:

- Use the tiles with play dough to encourage children to make flower imprints. Learning how much pressure to apply to get a good imprint promotes hand-eye co-ordination and fine muscle development. You could also play a game where an adult makes an imprint and the child finds the matching tile.
- Add the tiles to treasure baskets full of natural materials such as sticks, pine cones, acorns, feathers, shells, pebbles and fabric.



- Use the tiles as part of a flower-themed sensory bin in a basket or tray, with flower-shaped objects (such as buttons or foam shapes), real and artificial flowers, flowerpots, 'soil' (pebbles, beans or even coffee grounds), watering cans, trowels and gardening gloves.
- Create a meadow small-world play tray, adding the leaves to grass (real or artificial), real leaves, sticks, stones and animal figures.

## Books about flowers

*That's MY Flower!* by Alice Hemming

*Betsy Buglove Saves the Bees* by Catherine Jacob

*Lift and Look: Flowers and Plants* by Tracy Cottingham

