

HOW TO **PLAY** IN THE **WOODS**

Activities, Survival Skills, and Games for All Ages

This book is filled with fun things to do and useful information for back-to-nature adventures and camping trips. It is great for all ages and abilities and is a must-have for anyone working with scouts or youth groups.

- Learn how to make rope from plant materials
- Navigate using the sun or moon and nature's other signposts
- Build shelters, start a fire, safely make and handle knives, and gather food
- Create candles, baskets, bowls, and even instruments and jewelry

How to Play in the Woods is also a handy reference book for outdoor enthusiasts who want to brush up on basic survival skills.



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SMITH

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ROBIN BLANKENSHIP

**Activities,
Survival Skills,
and Games for
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Make Music in the Woods with Sticks and Stones

Have you ever picked up a stick and run it along a neighborhood fence line? A stick on a wooden fence makes a wonderful clack-itty-clack-clack-clack. Clack-itty-clack-clack-clack. A stick on chain link is stereo, reverberation.

IDEA

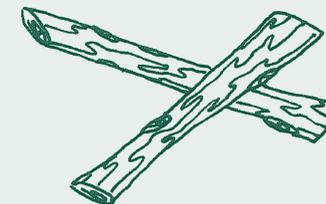
In the beginning, there was music; the crash of a wave, roar of thunder, rustle of a leaf, the dribble, dribble, drop, drop, pitter, patter, plop, splitter, splatter, splash of a drizzle turning to a drenching. Somewhere at the front of the human timeline your ancestor leaned down, picked up a stone or a stick, and played along to the rhythms of nature.

Do you think you're musical? Have you ever had a music lesson? Outside the lessons are free, the instruments are abundant, and the teacher persistent and patient. Scheduling, focus, and diligent practice are not required.

▲ SIMPLE PERCUSSION BEAT WITH STICKS AND STONES

So head outside, pick up a stone or a stick, and start your own jam. Clap your hands, tap your stones, clack your sticks, and become a member of the longest running musical performance group ever.

You'll be surprised once you start a stick and stone music session how many folks pop up to join you. The bigger surprise is how nature responds! Try it.



Make String and Rope from Plant Fibers

String, rope, fishing line, and lashing can be made from many kinds of plants and the barks of various bushes and trees. Whole leaves of certain plants, like cattail, can be twisted into rope and strong cord. When you know this, and know how to make plant materials into string or rope, there are so many outdoor living applications. It is useful knowledge for the survivalist.

QUESTION

Will this bark work? Will that leaf twist without breaking? Can I swing from a limb on this rope I made?

IDEA

When we walk into the woods asking good questions, we wake up a healthy imagination to possibilities. This is so much more fun than walking into the woods with all the answers.

If you want to try these activities at home first, just take some strips of paper towel, or even some yarn or ribbon you have around the house. You might use your shoelaces or even your hair, if it is long enough, to get the idea.

TWISTING PLANT FIBER INTO STRING

If you're ready to head right out, grab up some tall grass and get started. If you take a single strand of grass and pull on it hard at each

end, it is likely to break. But when you put several together and try pulling again, it is much stronger. Give it a try.

TWISTING PLANT FIBER INTO STRING

Take several blades of tall green grass, and holding them in a bundle, twist them together along their length. Green grass works better than dry grass because it doesn't break so much when you twist it. Dry grass will work too, but you'll want to get it wet first and twist it more gently. You have now given your blades of grass a **single spin**, in just the way that many yarns are made from animal fibers. You could simply wrap this around something

you want to hold together and tie the ends in a knot.

For a stronger string or rope, you want to learn to twist the different strands of fiber around each other in a way that they will hold together. This is what rope makers call a **plied cord**. It means two or more simple spun fibers are then wrapped back around each other in the opposite direction they were spun the first time. Let's try it.

TWISTING PLANT FIBER INTO 2-PLY STRING

Hold about three lengths of grass that you have simply spun together, firmly between your thumbs and pointer fingers of each hand, with your fingers spaced about 1 inch apart, right in the middle of their length. The spun ends will unravel a little bit. Don't worry.

With the right thumb and pointer finger, twist gently away from you, while at the same time, with the left thumb and pointer finger, twist gently toward you. As you do this, a small loop will form in the center of the grass strands. Pinch this little loop tightly between your left thumb and finger, holding it in



Make Shelters and Forts for Fun

Building shelters is fun. In all these years of teaching in the outdoors, I've never met anyone who didn't enjoy it. We have been seeking shelter from the first moments of human history, and the desire, willingness, and satisfaction of it are as natural to us as breathing. For now, let's look at shelter building from the perspective of playing in the woods. There are many practical and survival considerations about shelter discussed in *Survival Shelters*, p. 183.

QUESTION

Where will you build your shelter? Find a place that can be your special spot. You could go there to write or draw, listen to the sounds of the woods, or to nap. You could go there to hide for a few hours, and hidden in the woods, to see what wanders by or what animal adventures you might witness. Marvelous life stories are being performed all around you. In nature, the performances are free and you are always invited to be part of the audience. I have witnessed the most incredible dramas, comedies, mysteries, and miracles, all for the willingness to be present and to watch; sometimes to participate.



BUILD A STICK FRAME SHELTER, PART 1

A simple shelter framework can be made by laying a long pole-like stick that you find on the ground into the low notch of a tree. Then take more lengths of sticks and lean them up against one side of the pole at a good angle. They will rest where you set them and provide a wind break, shade, or just a comfy

feeling of cover. This is fun to do in a little tucked away place that you find yourself continuing to come back to. There is a sense of home-steading, moving into the nature neighborhood, and a sheltered spot to sit quietly and rest. Most of us find pleasure in it. It is a fun way to spend time in the woods.



BUILD A STICK FRAME SHELTER, PART 2

Once you have a basic framework, you can elaborate on your roof and wall designs. Are you just looking for a little shade, or are you looking for a hidden hollow. Are you wanting warmth and a wind break, or are you hoping to create a **blind** (a camouflaged cover that allows you to watch without being recognized as human) to observe wildlife? It is really fun to make your shelter look like a part of nature that passersby wouldn't even identify as something made by human hands.



When you get practiced at mimicking nature's patterns, even the animals become less timid and come very close, sometimes nibbling on parts of your shelter, sometimes, stealing some of your building materials for their own! If you are inside, this is so much more of a thrill than any nature program on TV could ever be.

BONUS

The added benefit is that you begin to get a close-up view of how animals behave, what their patterns and habits and preferences are, and if you are interested in animal tracks, you can see what actions created the variations in the tracks you find. Sometimes you are so well naturalized that small animals and birds come right up, on, and over you. If you don't wiggle, flinch, or scream, which is really hard, it is a thrill much bigger than a rollercoaster.



MAKE A SAND MAT FOR TRACKING

You can find out what kind of critters have visited your secret spot while you were away. Put a small welcome mat of soft dirt or sand close by. Each time you return

you can check that area for tracks or disturbances. Sometimes you come back to your shelter and find you have squatters!