



# Connecting Creatively to the Landscape

*Nature based activity guide for Care Homes*



Connecting creatively to the  
landscape of the Wye Valley AONB and Forest of Dean

mindSCAPE is a Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) project, funded by the Big Lottery (2014-2018) and co-ordinated and delivered by Artspace Cinderford. The mindSCAPE project aims to improve the well-being of people with dementia and their carers by connecting them to the landscape in a creative way.



Through the Heritage Lottery Funded Foresters' Forest Landscape Partnership Scheme, the mindSCAPE model is being delivered in care home settings. This resource guide has been produced through the Foresters' Forest programme. It includes ten, easy-to-follow practical activities as well as important considerations for a manager or activity co-ordinator to plan, develop, implement or deliver a mindSCAPE activity in their residential care home.

The booklet is based on hands-on experience and learning from those who have:

- engaged in the activity, e.g. participants with dementia and their carers
- delivered the activities, e.g. commissioned artists and creative facilitators
- organised, planned, developed and implemented the activities in the Forest of Dean since 2014, e.g managers and volunteers.

Participating in a nature based creative activity is not about focusing on the finished product. It is to be seen as an exploration and adventure - an opportunity to allow the freedom of expression. Therefore, it is essential the person delivering or supporting the activity does not 'manage' or 'control' the participants' creativity. A successful activity is where those engaging in the activity are able to freely explore and 'find their flow' in the process of being creative.

*"In a care home it's an opportunity for someone to reduce boredom. Boredom is a real issue for people with dementia - they need to be stimulated." (Carer)*

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## Introduction

Delivering a nature-based activity improves people's emotional well-being. Working as part of a group helps to reduce isolation and there is a wealth of scientific and medical research that shows that the natural environment helps to reduce stress and anxiety levels and improve mobility and fitness.

It also provides a format to deliver person-centred care and achieves a significant number of standards and good practice guidelines that are set out by the National Standards for Clinical Excellence (NICE), the Care Quality Commission and the Social Care Institute for Excellence.

For example: Quality Standard 4: Dementia: Independence and Wellbeing (QS30):

*“It is important that people with dementia can take part in leisure activities during their day that are meaningful to them. People have different interests and preferences about how they wish to spend their time. People with dementia are no exception but increasingly need the support of others to participate. Understanding this and how to enable people with dementia to take part in leisure activities can help maintain and improve quality of life.”*



Research shows people benefit from participating in arts-based activities. Evidence reveals these activities can help to:

- enhance the person's sense of self
- improve their mood and mobility
- facilitate social contact with others
- promote self confidence
- unleash unknown artistic talents!

*“Artwork provides a shared conversation piece. He is very proud of what he has done – he shows people who visit what he has achieved.” (Carer)*

# Important Considerations

A successful activity; a) meets the needs of those participating in the activity such as the clients and those supporting the clients such as volunteers and, b) fulfils the vision and objectives of the care home.

Therefore, before you deliver any activities, have you thought about the following issues:

- Funding – have you adequate funding to pay for materials?
- Co-ordinating – who will plan the activities that are to be delivered?
- Scheduling – will the activity be delivered at the same time every week or month?
- Decision-making – who will lead the activity?
- Reporting – is there a responsibility for the person delivering the activity to report on the participants' level of engagement in the activity?
- Evaluating – who will monitor and evaluate the activity?
- Supporting – who will support the participants during the activity?



*“Be mindful of resistance from staff to the extra work.” (Carer)*

Participants need to feel safe. Therefore, is your care home providing:

- a designated space to deliver the activities that is a safe space where it won't interfere with those who might not want to participate?
- comfortable chairs for people to sit on and tables for them to use?
- easy access to a toilet and/or a hand basin?
- assistants to help the less able to engage in the activity?



*“To be introduced to a creative process has given birth to something creative.” (Carer)*

## mindSCAPE Activity Sheets

You do not need to be artistically talented or qualified to deliver the activities in this Resource Booklet. Furthermore, nearly all of the activities can be delivered indoors. However, this may require additional preparation time to collect natural materials in advance.

Each activity sheet:

- states whether the activity can be delivered inside the care home, outdoors or both indoors and outdoors
- are colour coded to help you choose which activity best suits the season:
  - Spring = Yellow
  - Summer = Green
  - Autumn = Orange
  - Winter = Pale Blue
- gives an outline of:
  - a basic description of the activity
  - the required ability of the participant
  - the preparation time needed
  - the time required to carry out the activity
  - a shopping list of the materials required to deliver the activity
  - a step-by-step process on 'how to deliver' the activity
  - top tips!

It may also be important to practice some of the activities in advance so that you are familiar with the process. This will also mean that you have an example to show people.



*“It is good to have activities that run into each other. He finds it hard to cope with too much change each time.” (Carer)*

# Spring Activities



*"This has proved to be a great stress reliever and has enabled me to learn new skills and potentially take up new hobbies."*

*(mindSCAPE Participant)*

## PEBBLE PAINTING (Outdoors - Indoors; Spring)

Join the national craze and paint a pebble, or piece of Forest of Dean stone, then hide it for others to find. You could do this in the grounds of your care home.

### Activity Rating:

This activity is suitable for people of any age or ability, although support may be required finding a suitable pebble or piece of stone.

Preparation Time: 15 mins

Allow 15 minutes to set up a work space, ensure the tables are covered with a cloth.

Time Required for the Activity: 30 - 60 mins

The time will depend on how detailed the participants would like to make their painting or if they would like to make more than one.

### Shopping List:

Pebbles or stones (about the size of the palm of a hand)

A selection of acrylic paint

Cotton wool buds

Paint palette or paper plate

Varnish (optional)

Wet wipes (or a bowl of water with a flannel, or access to a hand basin)



### Step-by-Step Instructions:

1. Cover your work surface with newspaper or a cloth.
2. Make sure your pebble or piece of slate is clean and free from dust. If necessary, give it a wash and dry it thoroughly.
3. Paint a circle on the pebble using the acrylic paint. Draw the shape first with a pencil if it's easier.
4. Dry the circle with a hairdryer.
5. Using cotton wool buds, dip the bud into your selected paint and start in the middle of the circle to create a 'spot' design.
6. Change the colours for each circle.
7. Leave to dry and then seal with an exterior varnish.

### Top Tip!

Have wet wipes on hand (or a more eco-friendly alternative: a bowl of water with a flannel) to stop fingers and natural materials getting sticky.

## TEXTURE CHALLENGE (Outdoors / Indoors - Spring)

An opportunity to go for a short stroll and really do some detective work! Have cards made in advance with different textural words written on them and see how many people can find them in nature. Here are a few words to get you started:

Soft, spikey, rough, smooth, bumpy, fluffy, gritty, hard, slimy.

If it's difficult to get residents outside, then a box of textures could be brought indoors instead.

### Activity Rating:

All abilities with assistance outdoors. A lovely sensory activity for the visually impaired as it involves touch, but help may be required to read the words.

This activity is suitable for people of any age or ability, although support may be required in gathering natural materials.

### Preparation Time:

Allow 15 minutes to pre-prepare if you are going to collect the materials for the participants.

### Time Required for this Activity:

Depending on the mobility of the participants, it should take approximately 30 minutes to look for the different textures using the cue cards.

### Shopping List:

Pieces of paper

Scissors

Marker Pen



### Step-by-Step Instructions:

1. Cut up strips of white paper.
2. Clearly write different 'textural' words on the strips of paper (words like soft, spikey, rough, etc).
3. Go outside for a walk and see how many you can find! Alternatively, if you're going to do it indoors, let participants search through the natural materials you've brought inside for them.

### Top Tip!

Why not laminate the written words, so that they can be used more than once.

## NATURAL PLASTERCASTS (Outdoors / Indoors - Spring)

Here in the Forest of Dean, we are lucky to have a dedicated 'forest-inspired' sculpture trail. One of the sculptures is by an artist called Annie Cattrell called 'Echo' and is a huge cast of the side of a section of the forest, which has cleverly captured the textures of bark, roots and stone. Create your own cast using this simple technique with air drying clay and plaster of Paris.

The activity can be carried out over two sessions, one to make it and one to paint it once it's dry.

### Activity Rating:

All abilities with assistance outdoors and some dexterity will be needed to roll out the clay.

### Preparation Time:

Allow 15 minutes to pre-prepare. You will also require 15 minutes to lay out the materials on the tables for the participants to use.

### Time Required for this Activity:

Depending on the mobility of the participants, it should take approximately 15 minutes to collect the natural materials and another 30 – 40 minutes to create the cast. A further session can be added to paint the cast once it's dry.

### Shopping List:

Air drying clay

Plaster of Paris

Plastic container

(margarine/ice cream tub)

Old jug

Stick

Rolling pin

Silver acrylic paint

A variety of natural materials

Wet wipes

(or a bowl of water with a flannel, or access to a hand basin)

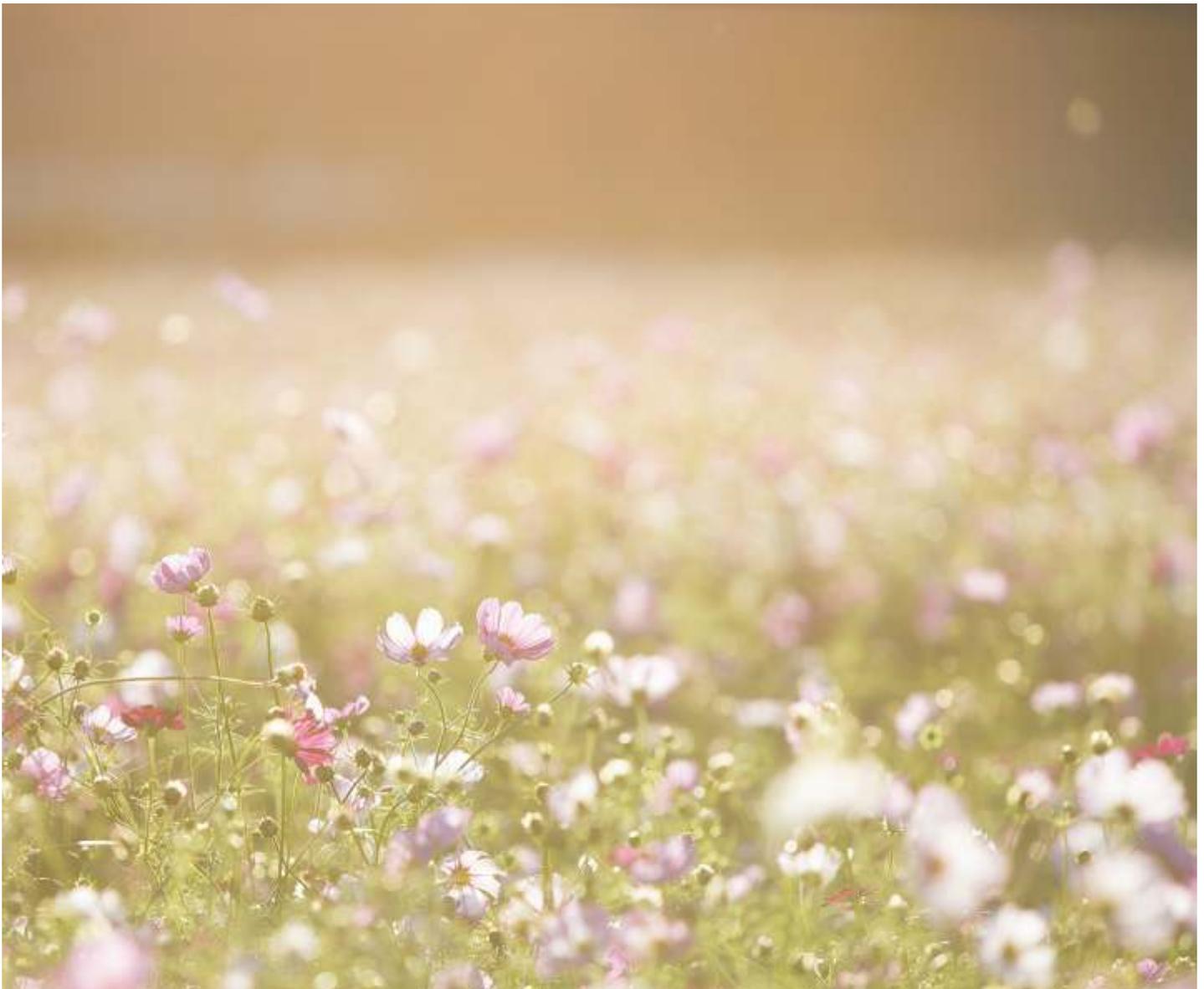


## Step-by-Step Instructions:

1. Cover your work surface with newspaper or a cloth.
2. Roll out a piece of clay to about 1 inch thick to the size of the plastic tub.
3. Place the clay into the bottom of the plastic tub, ensure the clay fits snugly and up to the edges of the tub.
4. Push interesting textures deep into the clay to create an imprint. Remove the textures. Experiment with delicate leaves and more robust things like fir cones.
5. Once you're happy, mix up some plaster of Paris as per the packs instructions, in an old jug or plastic container.
6. Pour the plaster into the tub and tap the sides to remove all air bubbles.
7. Leave to set overnight.
8. Carefully tip out the cast from the plastic tub and peel off the clay.
9. Clean off any clay from the surface, then paint with silver acrylic paint – just like Annie Cattrells sculpture.

## Top Tip!

You could use some of the objects that were collected on the texture challenge for this.



# Summer Activities



*“The activity was great fun and relaxing although hard work ha ha!  
Lunch was lovely, enjoyed spending time outdoors and find everyone  
so friendly and kind.”*

*(mindSCAPE Participant)*

## FLOWER PAINTING (Outdoors – Summer)

A lovely activity to do in the summer, using real flowers from your grounds and inspired by the large flower paintings of the artist Georgia O'Keefe.

### Activity Rating:

All abilities with assistance outdoors. Some dexterity will be needed to hold a paintbrush. Help may be required to help draw around the card template of the petal shape.

### Preparation Time: 20 mins

Allow time to prepare a card template of the flower petal shape for each participant. Allow 10 minutes to set the work space.

### Time Required for the Activity: 60 mins

Depending on how big and detailed the painting is, the flowers should take about 40-60 minutes to paint.

### Shopping List:

A piece of thick cartridge paper  
Watercolour paint or watered-down poster paint.  
Pencil

Oil pastels or wax crayons  
Water pot  
Real flowers  
Hairdryer



### Step-by-Step Instructions:

1. Cover your work surface with newspaper or a cloth.
2. Look at your flower shape and with the card template, draw around it with a pencil to re-create your flower.
3. Add details with oil pastels or wax crayons first.
4. Then start painting your petals with water colours. The pastels/crayons add texture and become a resist to the watery paint.
5. Dry off the paint with a hair dryer before you start another colour so the paint does not run.
6. Continue until all the petals are coloured in. Add leaves too if you wish.

### Top Tips!

To make the artwork even more special, have the participants create their piece on a canvas. These are relatively cheap to buy from art discount stores.

Prepare card templates of the petal shapes in advance from card/cereal packets.

## LEAF HUNT (Outdoors – Summer)

Do you know which leaf comes from which tree?  
Why not test your knowledge with a leaf identity walk?

The Woodland Trust has a brilliant leaf identify chart that can be downloaded for free from [www.woodlandtrust.org](http://www.woodlandtrust.org)

### Activity Rating:

All abilities with assistance outdoors. This activity is suitable for people of any age or ability, although support may be required for participants with visual impairments.

### Preparation Time: 15 mins

Allow 15 minutes to pre-prepare. You will also require 15 minutes to print off some leaf identity charts.

### Time Required for the Activity: 30 mins

Depending on the mobility of the participants, it should take approximately 30 minutes to collect the leaves.

### Shopping List:

Printed leaf identification charts

Paper bags to collect leaves



### Step-by-Step Instructions:

1. Give each participant a leaf identification chart.
2. Encourage the participants to go for a short walk in the grounds to find some of the leaves on the chart. Try to match as many as possible on the chart.

### Top Tip!

If mobility (or lack of tree varieties) restricts participants accessing outdoors, then collect a selection of different leaves and do the activity indoors.

Laminate the leaf identification charts for multiple use.

## NATURAL VIEW FINDER (Outdoors – Summer)

A short activity to bring you a little closer to some of the beautiful leaves in your garden or grounds. When you hold a leaf up to the bright sky, it becomes translucent and all the colours, patterns, veins and marks are more pronounced.

### Activity rating:

All abilities with assistance. This activity is suitable for people of any age or ability. However, it would be difficult for people with visual impairments to participate fully.

Preparation Time: 15 mins

Prepare some simple view finders beforehand.

Time Required for the Activity: 15 - 30 mins

The time will depend on whether the participants would like to look for leaves themselves as part of the activity and how many they would like to view.

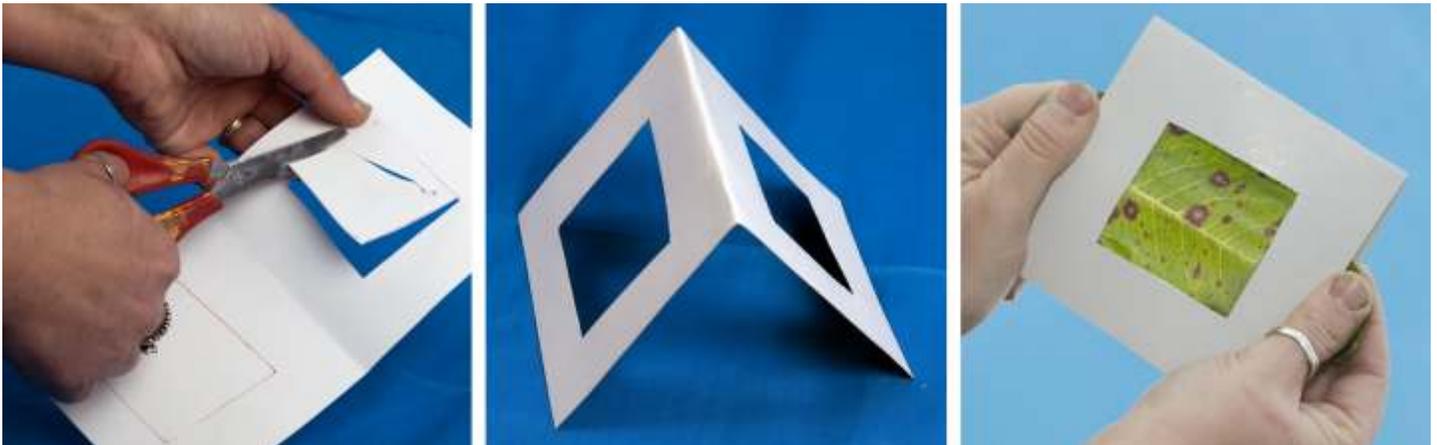
### Shopping List:

Card (old cereal packets would be perfect)

Pencil

Scissors

Different coloured leaves/petals



### Step-by-Step Instructions:

1. Cut up a piece of card about 10cm by 22cm.
2. Fold the card in half.
3. On one side draw a square in the middle and cut it out.
4. Draw another square on the other side (trace around the side you've already cut for size) and cut it out.
5. Now you have your view finder.
6. Take a stroll and look for leaves that will fill the view finder square.
7. Place your chosen leaf in the view finder, then hold it up to the sky (don't look directly at the sun) and look through it. Take note of all the fine details, shapes and colours.
8. Repeat the process with another leaf.

### Top Tip!

Don't look directly into the sun!

# Autumn Activities



*“I really enjoyed that session [wood carving] to such an extent that I am tempted to continue or at least potter around a bit! It certainly lifts the spirits.”*

*(mindSCAPE Participant)*

## NATURAL CONFETTI (Outdoors – Autumn)

Now that the leaves are turning lovely shades of yellow and orange and they are drying out, they can be used to make natural 'confetti'. Paper punches are quite cheap in discount art stores and leaves can be treated the same way as paper, creating all sorts of beautiful shapes. These can then be used to make greetings cards.

### Activity rating:

All abilities with assistance. This activity is suitable for people of any age or ability but some assistance may be required to help use the paper punches.

### Preparation Time: 15 mins

Allow 15 minutes to pre-prepare. If participants are able, take them for a short walk in the grounds to gather some Autumn leaves that they would like to use in their designs. Alternatively, this could be done beforehand. Allow time to lay out the materials.

### Time Required for the Activity: 30 - 45 mins

### Shopping List:

A pack of cards/envelopes

Punches

Glue – PVA or UHU

Glue spreaders



### Step-by-Step Instructions:

1. Cover your work surface with newspaper or a cloth.
2. Select your favourite leaves, then use the paper punch to create different shapes, by cutting them out of the autumn leaf.
3. Arrange the shapes on the greeting card and stick them down using either PVA glue and a spreader, or UHU glue.
4. Once the glue has dried, the cards can be sent to family and friends.

### Top Tips!

Discount art stores sell packs of pre-folded cards with matching envelopes, but of course you can make your own, by just folding A4 card in two.

## AUTUMN LEAF LANTERNS (Indoors - Autumn)

Bring the colourful outdoors inside by creating beautiful Autumnal night lights from old glass jars, decorated with tissue paper and real leaves.

Activity rating:

This activity is suitable for people of any age or ability.

Preparation Time: 15 mins

Allow 15 minutes to set up a work space, ensure the tables are covered with a cloth.

Time Required for the Activity: 30 - 60 mins

Shopping List:

Clean and dry glass jar

Mod podge (or thinned PVA glue)

Selection of Autumnal leaves

Scissors

Raffia

LED tea light candle



Step-by-Step Instructions:

1. Cover your work surface with newspaper or a cloth.
2. Cut out simple leaf shapes from tissue paper. Use oranges, yellows and browns, ones that will give the feel of Autumn.
3. With an old paint brush or glue spreader, begin to spread the thinned PVA (or Mod Podge) onto the surface of the jar and stick on your tissue paper shapes.
4. Continue all the way around the jar, overlapping the tissue leaf shapes, until the whole jar is covered.
5. Allow to dry, then with a strong glue (UHU is good), add some real Autumnal leaves around the jar.
6. Once you're happy with your design, tie some raffia at the top to trim it.
7. Place a LED tea light candle inside and when it's dark, turn it on to add a really lovely warm glow to the room.

Top Tips!

For safety, use a battery-operated LED tea light candle instead of a real candle.

# Winter Activities



*“I am able to settle into these sessions and remain for the whole time. Sometimes I have to leave activities after only a short time. Not with this.”*

*(mindSCAPE Participant)*

## TWIG CHRISTMAS TREES (Indoors – Winter)

Gather up sticks and create rustic but effective natural decorations for your Christmas tree.

### Activity rating:

This activity is suitable for people of any age or ability, although sticks may need to be gathered in advance and help may be needed to break them to size.

### Preparation Time: 15 mins

Allow 15 minutes to set up a work space, ensure the tables are covered with a cloth.

### Time Required for the Activity: 30 - 60 mins

### Shopping List:

Selection of sticks about the thickness of a pencil but various lengths

Strong glue (UHU is good)

Ice lolly stick (these can be bought in craft stores)

Pretty ribbon

Silver card



### Step-by-Step Instructions:

1. Cover your work surface with newspaper or a cloth.
2. Find a selection of sticks of varying lengths.
3. Place them from small to long, to create a 'triangle' shape.
4. Place glue along the lolly stick and fix the sticks in place, from short to long.
5. Allow to dry.
6. Flip over to the back and stick on a loop of ribbon.
7. Then turn it back over and stick on a star at the top.
8. Once dry, add it to your Christmas tree using the ribbon.

### Top Tip!

Most discount craft stores will sell pre-cut star shapes.

## FROZEN SCULPTURES (Indoors – Winter)

A lovely activity to prepare indoors, that can be placed outside on windows and enjoyed on frosty days, watching them slowly melt over time.

### Activity rating:

This activity is suitable for people of any age or ability, although support may be required in finding suitable natural materials to use.

### Preparation Time: 15 mins

Allow 15 minutes to collect some natural materials from outside, this could be done on a different day. Allow 10 minutes to set up a work space, ensure the tables are covered with a cloth.

### Time Required for the Activity: 15 - 30 mins

The time will depend on how big the sculptures are and how many each person makes.

### Shopping List:

Empty plastic tubs (ice cream/margarine)

A selection of natural materials

Access to water and a freezer



### Step-by-Step Instructions:

1. Fill the plastic containers with water.
2. Arrange natural materials in the water. Don't over fill with natural materials through, as you need some areas to be clear ice.
3. Place the containers in a freezer.
4. Once frozen, pop the ice out of the container and place in the garden or on window sills.

### Top Tips!

If space is limited in the freezer, get the participants to do a mini version using a yogurt pot. If a long piece of string is placed in the water and allowed to dangle out, once the water is frozen, the string can be used to tie the mini frozen sculpture into a tree.

## Guidance for those supporting the activities...

It can be challenging and overwhelming to those who have not participated in a nature or arts-based activity before. Therefore, it is important to have at least two people to support a group of six participants.

At the start of the session, ensure the participants you are supporting:

- Understand the aims of the activity – you may need to translate the instructions into their own language or terms of reference.
- Are able to access resources, materials and equipment to fully engage in the activity. If possible, assist them in clearing away their resources and materials at the end of the activity, thereby, leaving the area clean and tidy.
- Have every opportunity to do their own work, but do let the person leading the activity know of any difficulties that prevent them from participating fully.
- Feel safe. Follow the care home's policies if you identify any concerns, particularly safeguarding.

You have a key role in assisting the person, so please:

- Ensure you arrive on time at the start of the session.
- Leave your mobile phone switched to vibrate.
- Observe (or if required by the care home - record) the participants' behaviour in the activity and take note of what they achieved (or what provoked any form of agitation or difficulty).
- Know that your presence throughout the duration of the activity is greatly appreciated.

“It's all about getting into their world.” (Carer)

## Background

mindSCAPE evolved from an earlier Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) project called 'Inside Out' which was developed in partnership with the Forestry Commission and designed to allow under-represented groups access to the landscape and work through health issues creatively. These participants included people with mental health issues, physical and mobility issues, visual and hearing impairments, drug and alcohol issues, learning difficulties and those with age related problems and caring roles.

This pioneering project revealed older people (particularly those with dementia and their carers) faced the greatest barriers to participation and were therefore the 'hardest to reach'. The need for a specialist project for people with dementia sparked a consultation process whereby the AONB focused on the barriers people faced and how these could best be overcome. This thorough consultation included over 40 partner organisations, service users and carers and was a key element of the successful 'mindSCAPE' bid to the Big Lottery.

The mindSCAPE model has been adapted for inclusion in the Heritage Lottery funded Foresters' Forest Landscape Partnership Scheme. It will deliver nature and landscape arts-based activities in residential care settings, in order to reach those who are unable to attend the mindSCAPE project in the Forest of Dean.

## Foresters' Forest Heritage Lottery Funded Landscape Partnership Scheme

“Our forest is a shadow of our past industrial endeavours, our built heritage is being lost, our memories are fading and our knowledge of our past is becoming blurred and grey. We have unique cultural traditions that are in danger of coming to an end as this generation passes. We want to grasp this opportunity to draw a line under a long period of steady decline and loss, to take time to refocus on what makes our Forest, our Community, our Story special. To take time to inspire our youngsters and capture the knowledge and memories of our older generation before we lose that special link with our past.” (Foresters Forest)

Within The Foresters' Forest Heritage Lottery funded Landscape Partnership Scheme, mindSCAPE is working with residents in residential care homes in the Forest of Dean and Wye Valley AONB. It builds on the learning from the mindSCAPE project and records the stories and creative imagery of these residents in order to celebrate, remember and connect to the beauty, history and heritage of the area.

This resource is a step-by-step guide to support those working in residential care homes to deliver activities. It will ensure the learning and experiences from the mindSCAPE project are sustained and replicated in other settings to benefit others.

### Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

The Wye Valley AONB is a protected landscape, covering 92 km of the lower reaches of the River Wye from Mordiford to Chepstow, it is one of the finest lowland river landscapes in Britain. The AONB Unit are a small team who work, often in partnerships, to develop and deliver projects which contribute towards the areas natural beauty, and benefit people living in and visiting the landscape. MindSCAPE is one such project, which has been developed to enable people living with dementia and their carers to connect with the landscape in a sociable and creative way.



If you require further details of the mindSCAPE Project, please contact Hannah Elton-Wall at Artspace Cinderford on 01594 825 111 (extn 4) or e-mail: [hannah@artspacecinderford.org](mailto:hannah@artspacecinderford.org).



Forest of Dean  
— DISTRICT COUNCIL —

# FORESTERS' FOREST



Forestry Commission  
England



LOTTERY FUNDED