

# Crafts Council

## Everyday Making

All children should be supervised by an adult during this activity.



Forest craft: duck caller, frog stick and whimsy diddle by Richard Irvine

Forest Craft by Richard Irvine, published by GMC Publications, £14.99, available online and from all good bookshops

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# Duck caller

There is a huge range of commercial callers which can imitate up to eight different duck sounds. It's unlikely that the simple device in this project will fool a mallard, but we think it sounds just like a duck's quack!

## Materials:

- A knot/node-free length of freshly cut elder, about  $\frac{3}{4}$ in (2cm) in diameter and 4in (10cm) long
- Pruning saw
- Tent peg
- Sharp knife
- Thin card
- Sticky tape
- Pen or pencil
- Scissors

1.



Use the tent peg to push the pith all the way through the elder branch. Make sure all of the pith is removed and the tube is as clean and smooth as possible.

3.



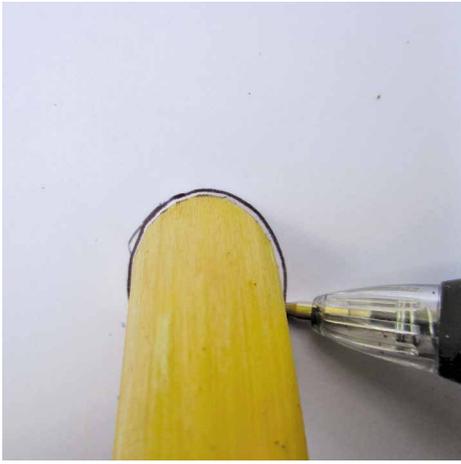
With a knife, use the thumb push cut technique to whittle one end of the tube to a 45-degree angle.

4.



Peel off the bark and leave the tube to dry in the sun and wind for an hour or so, until it no longer feels damp.

5.



Place the angled end of the tube on some thin card and carefully draw around it with a pen or pencil. Extend this outline by drawing a rectangular tab – this will be used to attach the card to the elder tube

6.



Cover the drawn outline with clear tape. Cut around the outline and fold a hinge in the card where the tab meets the outline of the end of the tube.

7.



Tape the tab tightly to the elder tube so that the hinge lines up with the edge of the angled end. Then fold the flap of card at the hinge so that it almost completely covers the end of the tube.

8.



7. Put your mouth over the end of the duck caller and blow!

## Top tip

If you can't find an elder tree, try using a piece of bamboo from a garden centre. Saw a section between the nodes and instead of whittling the 45 degree end, saw it at the correct angle. Beware of splinters. It might be an idea to sandpaper the sharp edges before use.

# Frog stick

This is similar to the Latin American instrument called a güiro. I call it a frog stick because it sounds a bit like a croaking frog when a striking stick is rubbed along the ridges of the instrument. Once you've mastered this basic version, try changing the notches to a different pattern or adding more teeth. Have a go with different types of wood and different sizes, and then get creative with rhythms.

## Materials:

- A straight hardwood branch, such as hazel or sycamore, about 15in (40cm) long and  $\frac{3}{4}$ –1in (2–3cm) in diameter
- A smaller-diameter hardwood stick of a similar length
- Hacksaw fitted with a wood blade
- Sharp knife

1.



1. Saw a series of parallel notches about 2cm apart and 1cm deep along the middle section of the larger stick. Leave 10cm untouched at either end. You will need the ends free to hold on to when you start whittling the notches.

2.



Place the blade of the knife halfway between two of the vertical cuts and carve down towards the base of the next vertical notch. Use the thumb push cut to carefully control where the knife stops. Repeat this process all the way along the stick.

3.



Turn the stick around in your hand and work in the other direction to repeat step 2.

4.



The end result will be a series of peaks and valleys. You can saw off the uncarved wood from one end of the stick if you wish.

5.



Carve two slices from the smaller stick to make a sharp edge, which will rub over the ridges in the bigger stick.

6.



Take the smaller stick and rub it quickly over the notches to make a croaking noise. Try out different diameters and types of wood for the scraper to find the optimum noise maker.

# Whimmy diddle

This oddly named object is a traditional American folk toy, sometimes also called a Gee-haw Whimmy Diddle, a Hooey Stick or Whammy Doodle. By rubbing the thin stick over the ridges the propeller will spin around. It's easy to convert a Frog Stick with the addition of a propeller at one end of the stick. You may also need to add some more ridges towards the propeller end. The instructions begin with a ready-made Frog Stick.

## Materials:

- A 2in (5cm) long knot-free branch about  $\frac{3}{4}$ in (2cm) in diameter
- Sharp knife
- Pruning saw
- Thin wire flathead nail up to  $\frac{3}{4}$ in (2cm) long
- Hammer

1.



Baton the 5cm long stick twice with the knife to split out a rectangular section about 2–3mm thick.

2.



Shape the sliver to a propeller shape if desired. This is not essential for the toy to work but it looks better. The propeller should be roughly symmetrical and evenly weighted on each side.

3.



Use the tip of the knife in a circular motion to make a hole in the centre of the propeller that is about twice the diameter of the nail. Test that the propeller spins freely.

4.



Put the nail through the hole in the propeller and push or hammer it into the centre of one end of the Frog Stick.

5.



Hold the Whimmy Diddle and the small stick as shown. Rub the small stick over the ridges and watch the propeller spin. Making it change direction takes practice but can be done by pressing the index finger of the hand holding the small stick against the body of the Whimmy Diddle edge, which will rub over the ridges in the bigger stick.

# Cutting techniques

When carving with a knife, find a comfortable place to sit with enough room around you to be able to move freely without coming into contact with anyone else.

1.



Thumb push cut:

This technique is a safe and trusty friend but if used incorrectly or over used can leave you with a sore and calloused thumb. The knife hand just maintains the correct cutting angle and applies almost no force to this cut. All the pushing is done by the thumb of the hand which is holding the work piece.

Try

and keep the pushing thumb in contact with the handle rather than the metal spine of the knife.

2.



Batoning:

Always split on to another piece of wood and not the ground, stone, brick or concrete. Stand the round section of wood up on your stump and place the knife across the end section, making sure that it goes through the pith. Tap the back of the knife with a spare piece of wood (never metal on metal) to start a split, then more firmly to split the section in two. Always line the knife up parallel with your body and think about where the arc of the knife will travel if it carries on through the wood and keeps moving. This technique can be hard on your knife, especially if you hit a knot in the wood. The choice of tool is important here. I never use a folding knife or the laminated steel Sloyd knife for batoning, I always prefer the more robust (and cheaper) general-purpose Companion.

## Where to find wood

The UK has the lowest percentage of tree cover in Europe but there are still plenty of trees in local parks and woodlands. It is NOT OK to just head out with your saw and help yourself to growing branches or fallen dead wood. Always find out who owns or manages the land and ask permission. It is a good idea to keep your eyes open for tree surgeons, landscape gardeners and foresters going about their work in your neighbourhood, and ask them for some wood.