

Which woodland creatures could be hiding among the leaves and pine cones? The Forest Scenery Stones are a tactile and open-ended addition to nature-themed small worlds and loose parts play. Their shapes and patterns promote creativity, language and pattern making.

### Loose parts

Offer the Scenery Stones alongside other nature-themed loose parts, to boost children's critical thinking and creativity. Using loose parts to create patterns and stacks, investigate different textures and invent stories builds on several areas of learning, including maths, literacy, understanding of the world and fine motor skills.



A forest-themed loose parts collection is ideal for outdoors. You might like to use the sand tray as a sandy forest floor, or just a grassy area. As well as the Scenery Stones, your loose parts could include:

- Twigs and larger branches
- Leaves (various sizes) and moss
- Conkers, cones, acorns and other seeds
- Stones
- Tree bark
- Flowers (real or artificial)
- Wooden resources, such as small log slices, wooden balls, trays or buttons



### Woodland creativity

The stones also offer simple and open-ended ways to get creative and develop fine motor skills:

- Use the stones and natural materials to create woodland pictures or patterns – indoors or outside.
- Press the stones into dough to leave an imprint. What does the imprint feel like? Does it feel like a real leaf, log or cone? You could also make patterns with imprints.
- Use wax crayons and paper to make rubbings of the stones. Learning how much pressure to apply is great for fine motor skills.

### Small woodland world

The Scenery Stones offer an open-ended way to enhance small world play, inspiring children's imagination and enhancing their language development. Use these ideas to create a woodland world inside or outdoors:

#### Forest floor

A forest floor made with sensory materials will make small world play even more inviting!

- So much of nature is sensory – from smooth stones to dry crunchy leaves. Scatter natural materials to create a base for your forest, such as pebbles, leaves or sand.
- For an easy natural option, go outside and use a grassy area or bare soil as your base.
- Other sensory bases could include brown play dough, artificial grass, dry green lentils or brown cloud dough. (To make brown cloud dough, simply mix well four parts flour to one part cocoa powder to one part oil or lotion.)

## Trees and leaves

- Include trees to create your forest, or alternatively, stick twigs into blobs of play dough to stand them up as trees. If you're outside and the earth is soft enough, you could even stick twigs upright in the ground.
- Position the leaf and cone stones standing upright to create ideal hiding places for shy forest animals.
- Use the log slices as tree stumps – animals will love jumping between them!
- Other forest elements could include Yellow Door's small/large tree stump or hollow log, twigs, leaves, acorns and other natural materials.



## Woodland water

- Create a woodland pool or stream, using blue fabric, paper, glass beads or a small mirror. Alternatively, use real water.
- The log slices can be stepping stones for forest animals and the leaves could become lily pads for frogs to sit on.

## Forest friends

- Add animal figures, such as Little Lands: Woodland or Woodland Animal Families Wooden Characters.
- Instead of using a variety of woodland plants and animals, focus on just one – such as flowers, butterflies, birds or squirrels. You could use one of Yellow Door's Sensory Play Stones sets for this, such as Flowers, Butterflies or Birds.
- Add familiar characters from a book with a woodland setting for small world bookish play. These could be wooden characters from a story such as *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* or *Little Red Riding Hood*, or printed out illustrations. Leave the book alongside for children to interact with too.



## Books about forests

*Owl Babies* by Martin Waddell

*The Gruffalo* by Julia Donaldson

*The Leaf Thief* by Alice Flemming

*Percy the Park Keeper* series by Nick Butterworth

## More to explore

The stones provide opportunities for developing mathematical thinking, such as counting and spatial reasoning:

- Talk about the different shapes and sizes of the Scenery Stones. Children might enjoy laying them out and counting them, or sorting them into the three sets of six.



- Make imprints in play dough using the different stones. Stamp the stones in different orientations using both the smooth and patterned sides. Then ask the children to match the stones to the imprints. They will learn important spatial reasoning skills as they learn to turn and flip the stones to make them match the imprints.
- Use the stones to create repeating patterns – either flat on a surface, or in a stack. Talk about the pattern the child makes – is it leaf, cone, log, leaf, cone, log (ABC pattern) or something else?
- Create patterns with reflectional and rotational symmetry. Children might also create patterns that radiate out from the centre.
- Encourage positional language – maybe the leaf stone is between two cone stones, or perhaps the squirrel is on a log slice or *behind* a tree.



### *Get talking – useful words*

Forest, woods, log, branch, stick, twig, leaf, bark, pine cone, conker, acorn, seed, pond, stream, nest, burrow, den