

GREEN TUNNELS AND LABYRINTHS

Consider the use of tall planting to help break up large, open areas of the school grounds to create smaller, atmospheric spaces to support learning. As well as creating interest, supporting biodiversity and meeting the needs of those children who feel more comfortable in smaller spaces, tall species (such as willow) can also be planted in the form of a tunnel to create interesting journeys between spaces.

Definition

A green tunnel is a structure created by planting a tall, flexible plant species in two parallel lines before tying the upright rods together overhead to create an archway. If the tunnel is wide enough, then this gives children the opportunity to spend time in the tunnel whilst allowing others to pass through unhindered. Tunnels can be planted with both ends open or with an entrance / exit at one end and leading to another space (for example a seating area).

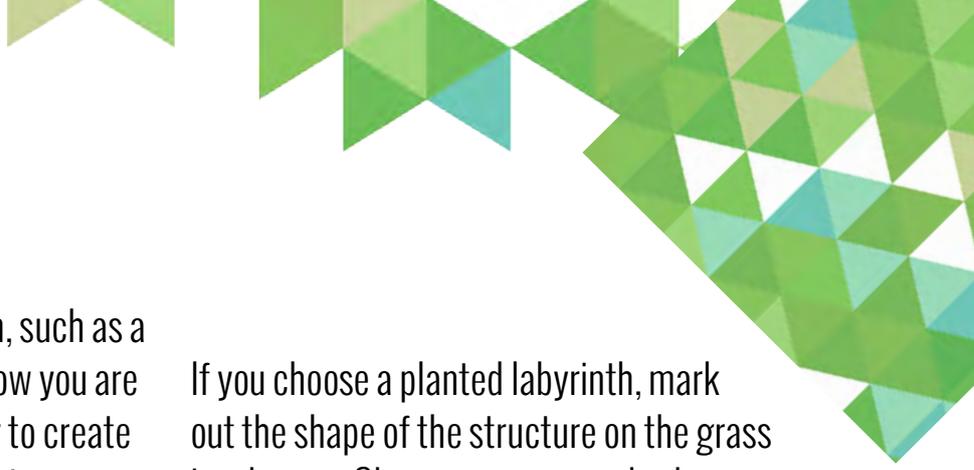


A green labyrinth, or maze, is a system of planted corridors for children to navigate with no direct link from one end to the other.

Procedure

Based on your needs, the space available and the labour support team identified, decide which type of structure you are going to plant and where. Involve the children in identifying the best location, marking out and measuring the space, sourcing the correct number of plants and the materials needed and then in the actual planting itself. Be aware that the planting will take some time to grow and establish and thicken to create the structure you are aiming for. However, once established you will be rewarded with a structure that supports biodiversity, creates natural shade, provides shelter from the wind and, with ongoing maintenance, will last many years.

If you choose a green tunnel, decide on its purpose – either to enhance the journey between two spaces or as a



walkway to a specific destination, such as a quiet seating area. Think about how you are going to tie the planting together to create the shape required. Lengths of string or plastic cable ties are two potential options. Willow is supplied in log lengths called rods. The rods are long and straight and flexible, meaning they can be planted directly into the ground and then tied together to create the shape required. Other taller planting may need to be supported to grow through the use of a simple frame comprising wooden poles and wire. Train the plants to grow along the wires by tying branches using the string or cable ties. Make sure all ties are adjusted over time as the plants grow.

If you choose a planted labyrinth, mark out the shape of the structure on the grass in advance. Choose ever green shrubs or taller plants such as willow or bamboo.

Check the quality and depth of the soil profile first, you may need to import some top soil. Maintenance should be undertaken over the winter when the plants are dormant. In the case of willow, weave new growth between rods to maintain the shape of the structure and prune excessive growth. Check ties on all plants to ensure they are not restricting growth.

Tips

- There are plenty of willow growers, suppliers and artists online who can offer advice and support

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