

# Five things to do with... tree trunks and log slices

How to enjoy tree trunks and logs safely. By *Julie Mountain*

The best way to source chunks of tree trunk or smaller logs and slices is to befriend a tree surgeon or landscape gardener. Transporting tree trunks and logs is often the most difficult part of sourcing them, so find a business that will happily drop logs off for you. Once you have a relationship with it, you can start to ask for 'extra' favours – for example, chain-sawing to a specific size or shape, or creating level bases on long lengths of tree trunk so they won't roll over.



## 1. MINIBEAST HABITATS

Even the tiniest outdoor space can become a refuge for wildlife. A pile of logs of different sizes, tucked away in a quiet(ish) spot will soon attract minibeasts, especially if you're able to locate it on grass, soil or mud. Encourage children not to constantly move the logs; minibeasts like a bit of peace, quiet and darkness. Choose a couple of logs that are too heavy for children to lift easily, so that there is always a refuge for the ants, worms, beetles, centipedes, spiders, earwigs and woodlice that will soon colonise it. If you are lucky, your log pile will also attract hungry birds and small mammals in search of dinner!

## 2. PLAY STRUCTURES

A selection of log slices, chunks of log, lengths of tree trunk and planed planks will combine perfectly with your crates, pallets, loose parts and fixed play equipment to enable children to create their own, changing



play structures. Build upwards using the log chunks for height, or span vast distances with planks to protect children from lava or crocodiles.

Pegs, bungee cords and string, along with a few old blankets or sheets, will provide a springboard for inventive den structures. Arrange the logs and trunks as a home-made time

**Cut the wood into different shapes and sizes to create a range of resources, from the artistic to the physical**



trail – make it trickier with wobbly logs, different distances between objects and level changes, all of which will encourage physical activity.

## 3. MINI CHALKBOARDS

Children will love creating their own mark-making resource. Choose thin slices of log – of any diameter – and ask children to sand both sides with a sanding block (packs of four can be bought from pound shops). Drill two holes through each slice, close to the bark edge – if you have 'palm drills', children can do this themselves. Cover both sides with two coats of chalkboard paint and allow to dry. Thread twine or coloured cord through the holes and you have mini chalkboards.

## 4. FIRE OR STORY CIRCLE

Four or five long, chunky logs, arranged in as near to a circle shape as you can manage, will provide an instant seating area. An 'inner' smaller ring of logs will allow you to build and cook on a fire – or you could house a low-level barbecue or fire bowl there. Consider the location carefully – if your circle is for stories or gatherings, dappled shade is a good idea; if you plan to have fires, make sure there is plenty of air space above the circle.

## 5. MEDALLIONS

Choose a chunky branch, and slice it up into thin 'medallions'. Drill a small hole through each medallion (children can do this if you have palm drills) and ask children to sand both sides. They can now design their medallion, colouring it with permanent markers, or gluing on glitter and gems. A colourful ribbon threaded through the hole will finish off the medallion beautifully. ■

## BENEFIT-RISK ASSESSMENT

Simple, commonsense risk assessment will ensure that play on or with tree trunks, chunks and slices is as safe as it is enjoyable.

- Splinters are inevitable and you should discuss this with parents, particularly regarding removal of splinters.
- Remove obvious hazards such as loose chunks or sharp splits in the wood, or the remains of branches that might cause logs to flip over.
- Sanding the exposed (cut) edges of logs and slices can reduce the risk of splinters, but it won't eliminate them completely. Sanded surfaces are better for painting or gluing on to.
- Lifting and transporting logs is a fundamental part of their attraction. Encourage children to bend from their knees when lifting (perhaps with knee symbols posted next to the log store) and provide a range of ways of transporting – for example, wheelbarrows, trike trailers or rope for dragging.
- Store logs discreetly, away from your building, so that they don't facilitate climbing on your roof after-hours.