



Young gardeners just love the great outdoors!

Whether it's growing veg, keeping chickens or even managing a woodland, children at one county primary school can more than cope, as *Penny Bunting* discovers.

IF ASKED to describe a perfect childhood, most people would probably mention playing outside. Climbing trees, building dens in the woods and making mud pies are childhood activities that many of us remember fondly, along with bird spotting, bug hunting and gathering blackberries in autumn.

Unfortunately, many children today don't often get an opportunity to play outside – a problem recognised by the National Trust, which launched its '50 things to do before you're 11¾' campaign (www.50things.org.uk) to encourage UK children to spend more time out and about and exploring the countryside.

Making a difference

LITTLE Green Space is an award-winning, non-profit environmental project that aims to create a network of green spaces across Derbyshire and the Peak District. The project works with schools, businesses and communities to turn small areas of land into rich, healthy habitats for people and for wildlife.

Since its launch in March 2008, Little Green Space has worked with several schools in the region. As well as the mini-orchard and a wildflower meadow created at Lea Primary, the project has funded and planted fruit trees, meadows, vegetable gardens and bee and butterfly borders at Matlock Bath Holy Trinity School, Matlock's All Saints Infants and All Saints Juniors and Castle View Primary.

Over 2,000 native broadleaved trees have been planted, including a woodland area at Wessington Primary School. The project also encourages sustainable living, protection of biodiversity and action to tackle climate change, through articles in local and national newspapers and magazines and advice on its website.

Every little green space will make a small difference. But together they could create a network – making a big difference. The potential is huge. Visit www.littlegreenspace.org.uk to see what you could be doing in your space – at home or in your community.



The bee garden at All Saints Infants School in Matlock.

Enjoy these not-so-secret gardens!

THE 2014 'Secret Gardens' and annual fete at Edensor will be officially opened at noon on Saturday, June 21 by the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire.

For the fourth successive year the gardens in Edensor will be open to visitors, including the magnificent garden of the Old Vicarage. Resident gardeners will be on hand throughout the afternoon to chat to visitors.

There will also be a motorbike display, locally-made crafts from Chatsworth's 'Crafty Bunch', a vintage Rolls Royce and jazz musicians.

Entertainment will include the Cock & Magpie Morris Dancers, Belper Town Wind Band, a Punch and Judy show and a traditional hurdy-gurdy machine.

Canon Dave Perkins will be leading sing-a-longs, there will be folk musicians in the food court and you can even have a go at bell ringing!

On the village green will be stalls offering home-made cakes and jams, tombola, plants, "unwanted gifts" and books.

Cream teas will be served in the church and there will be a Pimms bar and a hog roast. Edensor Tea Cottage will also be open as usual.

Entrance is £5 per adult (under-13s admitted free) with free parking and proceeds will go to St Peter's Church and local charities.



Edensor's 'secret gardens' and fete is on June 21 this year.



However, pupils at Lea Primary School – a Forest School since 2012 – would have few problems ticking off the 50 items on the National Trust's list. Being outside has become a regular part of the curriculum, with an active outdoor learning programme that teaches pupils practical skills such as woodland management – using real, full-sized tools – and vegetable growing.

The school has its own large woodland and a grassy paddock complete with roundhouse – constructed by the children – where lessons are held outside. There's also a vegetable garden, chickens, a polytunnel and a mini-orchard – recently created with the help of environmental project Little Green Space.

Visiting the school during one of their outdoor learning sessions, I was impressed by the variety of activities taking place – and at how enthused and motivated the children were. They were clearly enjoying every minute.

Spencer, James, Toby and Frank showed me where they had planted native woodland saplings the previous week, to help regenerate parts of the woodland. Their task today was to sow wildflower seeds in the bare areas of soil around the trees.

"Going outside in the woods gives us inspiration," says Spencer, aged 11. "It helps us use our imaginations when we're back in the classroom, especially when we're writing stories."

"Yes, and we work harder, too," adds James, 11. "It's



Top: This "roundhouse", built by pupils at Lea Primary School, is used for 'outdoor learning' sessions.

Above: Year 6 teacher Glynn Woodruff is the Forest Schools coordinator at Lea Primary.

easier to concentrate when you've been outside in the fresh air."

In another part of the wood, a small group of children is working with parent helper Lindsey Henning to create land art – sculptures made from natural objects found in the woodland, such as twigs, stones and plants. They have crafted a wood spirit called Eliza from woven branches, garlands of ivy and sheets of fabric. During the sculpture's creation, the children have invented an elaborate story about Eliza's life and how she ended up as a guardian of the forest.

As a parent, Lindsey values the opportunities offered at the school. "The experiences the children have here really capture the essence of childhood," she says. "They're out in the woods with their friends, building dens, creating artwork and working together – things



that all children should be doing. It makes learning quite magical."

Meanwhile, down in the paddock, 11-year-old Adelaide has spent the first part of the afternoon constructing a net – this will form the seat of a stargazing chair, made from four large branches roped together to form a frame, with a swinging net seat.

Now Adelaide is learning how to use a billhook safely, with Year 6 teacher Glynn Woodruff. Glynn is the Forest Schools coordinator for Lea Primary, and is passionate about the children's outdoor learning experiences.

"The children at Lea are given opportunities to take risks in a safe, supervised environment," he explains. "They learn to trust one another, work as a team and respect their environment – as well as developing new skills and having plenty of fun!"

There's no doubt that the outdoor learning sessions are fun. Josiah, aged 10, shows

Left: Lea Primary pupil Chloe is busy lighting a fire.

me how to light a fire using a flint and steel. A campfire has already been lit using this method, and two members of the group are responsible for keeping it alight with bellows and a continuous supply of firewood. Campfire cooking is also on the curriculum, and the children are planning a three-course lunch for staff and pupils. The children will choose what's to be on the menu, prepare and cook it themselves – and, of course, clear up afterwards.

Safety is paramount for all the activities on offer and children are required to prove they know how to work safely before they are allowed to handle tools or light fires independently. They are also encouraged to assess risks themselves – this helps increase confidence and self-esteem, as well as awareness of others. They are taught to look out for one another and to keep each other safe. And throughout all the activities there is an atmosphere of cooperation, respect and pride.

An outdoor learning session at Lea Primary is exactly what an ideal childhood should look like: active, imaginative, exciting – and just a little bit muddy! ■