

What is a Nature Table? Seasons Table? Festival Table?

A nature table, also known as a seasonal table, is a place in the home where you can follow the natural cycle of the year. (Remember this post where I discussed rhythm? I mentioned a yearly rhythm and this is a great way to incorporate that). The nature table allows the changes that are taking place in the natural world to be given expression indoors.

The figures and items on the table depict the essence of what is happening in nature. Creating and maintaining a nature table will sharpen your observation of what goes on in nature from your adult consciousness. Young children do not knowingly study nature but they are nevertheless unconsciously aware of its laws. The important aspect of a nature table as it relates to children is that the child is able to connect with the objects and the scene depicted on the table. First, the search for objects in nature help both parents and child connect to and live in accordance with the rhythm of the seasons. We are no longer just a part of time forward but we are experiencing deeply a piece of the season.

When we as parents bring the external world indoors, children learn to appreciate the many ways in which nature is at work in their surroundings. A nature table or seasonal table can be whatever you want it to be. Simple or elaborate. Generally, the scene will be related to the current season or an upcoming festival or holiday. I typically have a Spring nature table in March, April, and May; a Summer nature table in June, July, and August; an Autumn nature table in September, October, and November (with a special scene added during Thanksgiving week); and a Winter nature table in December, January, and February (with a nativity scene added the week of Christmas). The nature table is often the focal point of a main living area of a child's bedroom.

It is a beautiful affair to create a nature table with your child. I have a set group of objects that I use for each season and then Tiny adds her "finds" on an ongoing basis. Children of walking age and older can help collect beautiful natural objects for the table. It should not be up to the parent to do this solely. I do not put any restrictions on what Tiny can add to the table. I do make sure that items are free of bugs and grime but generally, Tiny picks out some pretty nice natural objects.

Older children can make objects themselves to add to the table. Finger knitted dolls, animals, and trees are simple items that school age children can make. Children over 10 might like to add a wood working type of item such as a wooden acorn or small structure. Paintings or painted silks can be added as backdrops. Older children are only limited by their imagination which is vast.

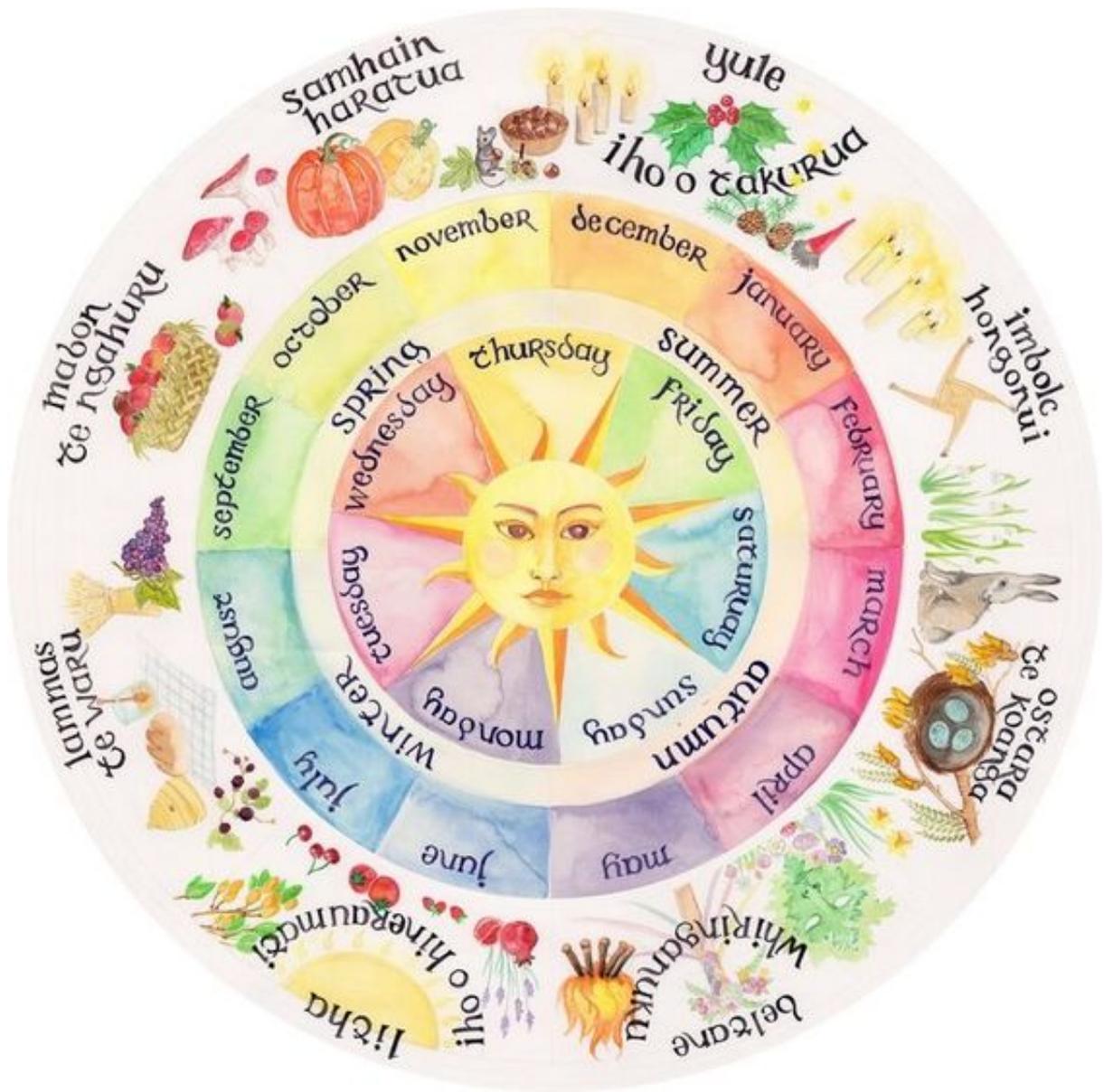
The nature table is also a great way to highlight and celebrate seasonal festivals. You can add elements to your base table that are specific to a holiday or festival or you can create an entire section or separate area devoted to festivals. Children connect deeply with the rhythms of the seasons and becoming acquainted with various festivals and their meanings is a great way to embrace your child's nature desire for connection. You can celebrate any sort of festival. I am moving towards incorporating festivals from all over the globe. I think that this is a magical way to expose Tiny to the cultures from which her family came but also those found in cultures not as familiar to our family.

The wonderful thing about a nature table is that the results from day to day, month to month, and year to year will vary a lot! Constantly improving and adapting the table to new treasures or changing seasons is a lot of fun both for parent and child.

Here are a few ideas to help get you started.

- A table, shelf, or bookcase that is typically taller than 3 feet or so.
- Some sort of soft flowing material (like silk, wool, or cotton) that can be draped across the table. This material will reflect the season in color so perhaps white for winter and a light green for spring. You can use additional pieces of materials for accent colors or as a backdrop such as a blue piece of silk for a sky.
- Levels are important. You do not want everything at the same height. Use rocks, tree blocks, and the like to elevate certain items. Nature is not all at one level and neither should the objects on your nature table.
- In spring, a mother earth doll is a wonderful addition. Mother Earth wakes up her children and sets them to work planting flowers and plants. Spring fairies can also be added. A hen with chicks, a sheep with lambs, eggs, birds and nests, bunnies, and other baby animals are all appropriate. Lots of natural items depicting the awakening of spring are encouraged. Buds or trees and shrubs, flowers, and the like work well and are easy to find. Think yellows, greens, and pinks.
- In the autumn (my favorite nature table), there is so much that can be found in nature and displayed on the nature table. Colors are deep and the use of dark reds, maroons, deep oranges, browns, and forest greens are important. Nuts, dried berries, dry and falling leaves, acorns, gourds, pumpkins, roots, and the like are items your child will collect in mass quantities. Animals making nests and caves can be incorporated. Small baskets filled with autumn treasures can be added as well.
- The winter table has endless possibilities depending on where you live and what the weather is like. Natural elements like snow, rain, frost, and gloomy skies need to be incorporated. Holly berries, pinecones, evergreens, wreaths, sticks, bare tree branches, crystals, and burrowing animals are nice elements. You can of course add in items depicting advent, Christmas, and other seasonal celebrations. The most important aspect of creating a nature table with your child is that you are doing it together and connecting on a deeper level to the season and to each other.

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Summer:



Autumn:



Easter:

Before Easter:



After Easter:



Whitsun:



Matariki:



Winter:



Spring:



Advent:

