

CREATING A STUMPERY

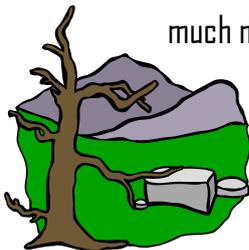
Why not construct a stumpery at your school. (You could put one in at home too, if you have a garden.) Stumperies were very popular during Victorian times, but are now becoming fashionable again in modern British gardens. They provide a wealth of planting opportunities **and also provide a real sanctuary for wildlife.** (They'd go down really well with Eco-Schools inspectors!)

You can find loads of examples of these features online. They are similar to rock gardens, but are constructed from tree stumps, waste logs, roots, lumps of bark, etc. You can, of course, include rocks too, if you'd like to. <http://www.houzz.com/stumpery>

Stumperies are an ideal place to plant up and grow ferns. In Victorian times, people had just realised how ferns reproduced themselves, and it was seen as more appropriate for ladies to collect and grow ferns because of the lack of obvious reproductive parts. (The Victorians were rather more straight-laced than we are.)



A stumpery is really just a collection of roots, etc. from hardwood trees that have died and been cleared from the ground. (You can also use softwoods, but they rot much more quickly.) The best woods are oak, sweet chestnut and beech, as they rot slowly. The stumps and logs are used to create a framework in a shady area. The more 'architectural' the stump, the better.



What you are doing is recreating what the forest floor would have looked like in the time before we became too tidy. (It really annoys me when an old tree dies in a park, for instance, and the council workers are there straight away, removing it. "*Elf and safety, gov.*" Why not just lay it on its side, so that it is safe, and then just let it rot, as nature intended?) The old forest floor would have been an intricate mixture of young plants, old plants and lots of rotting material. It's this rotting layer that a stumpery creates.



So, how do we do it? You could enquire at Forestry Commission surgeons and seeing if



If you live in a rural area, then stumps should be fairly easy to find, your local wildlife trust, woodland management firm, the or just local farmers. You could try looking up local tree they have scrap timber they've taken away from a job.

If you can get hold of it, hardwoods such as oak, sweet chestnut and beech are best,

though other hardwoods would do.



DO NOT TAKE TIMBER FROM ANY LAND WHERE YOU DON'T HAVE THE OWNER'S PERMISSION – THAT IS THEFT.

Try to locate your stumpery in a shaded spot, behind a hedge, in a copse or behind a building which casts shade. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00bldrv>

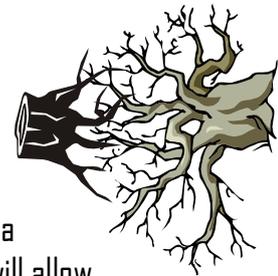
A stumpery can serve as a link between the more 'managed' areas of the school grounds, (though they still need to be managed to some extent), and your wild areas. Stacking up logs into a log-pile is great for hedgehogs, invertebrates and also any reptiles in your area, such as lizards. It gives them somewhere to lie up, and also provides a ready source of food. The invertebrates eat the wood, and the hedgehogs and reptiles eat the invertebrates. Perfect!



Your stumpery will become a part of the natural cycle of life, and as part of that cycle of decomposition, you could get many fungi growing, some of which can be edible. **DO NOT EAT ANYTHING FROM YOUR WILD AREAS UNLESS AN EXPERT HAS TOLD YOU THAT THEY ARE SAFE.**

In your garden at home, you can even buy edible fungus spores, which will provide you with crops of edible fungi for years to come.

You'll want to make your stumpery look as natural as possible. Dig out some of the soil and bury half to two thirds of your stump. Lay the root stump on its side. Try putting a couple of stumps together to interlock. You are replicating a fallen tree. The soft wood will decay first, leaving you with a skeleton of harder wood. Fill it up with a mixture of fairly fertile soils, this will allow you to make little crevices to plant up.



Once the soil has settled a little, you can plant it up. Ferns are a great plant to use, such as hart's tongue fern. They'll love the damp, shady conditions. You can also use sphagnum moss to tuck around the root-ball to keep it moist and keep the soil together. You can plant up winter bulbs, such as snowdrops and winter aconite. Around the edges, you might try wild garlic, though these will spread and will need to be managed. (They'll also give you a gorgeous smell.) What about carnivorous plants? They would really give your garden or wild area a special feel. Your stumpery could be a really surreal place, with a magical atmosphere that will kindle your imagination – great for ideas for creative writing, or just somewhere calm to hang out.

Habitat maintenance: You can maintain your stumpery largely by not removing any of the old timbers. Let them decay naturally, even when they are really falling to bits. Just top up your display by adding newer stumps and logs near to the old ones. Keep the plants in the stumpery watered regularly.

