

Muddy Monsters

As the song goes; '*Mud, Mud, Glorious Mud*'

There's something quite magical about the stuff. It's wet but not like water, its consistency can vary from sludge to solid. It can transform from one state, liquid, and back to another, solid, by applying or removing water. You can shape it, squeeze it and pour it.



Clay is 'posh mud' and if you dry it in a kiln you end up with all sorts of useful items like cups, vases and other stuff. You can buy air dry clay or make a salt dough clay easily at home which means you can keep your creations forever once they're dry - but they will just go soggy and fall to pieces in the outdoors and will contaminate the area - use these for other activity.

OK it can be a bit messy - who cares?! It's good for the imagination, good for exploring scientific ideas and great for play. We can always clean up afterwards!

You will need

Mud (a bit of soil and water)

A container, bucket/ bowl

A stick, spade or trowel (to dig and stir with)

Some items to decorate your monster (you can collect these at any time)

Somewhere to play

Old clothes that your grown-up doesn't mind getting mucky

And somewhere to wash afterwards!

You will need to dig and collect some soil.

If you don't have a garden ask someone who has or someone with an allotment if you could have small amount of soil, or try our [dough monster recipes below](#) if you are at home. Most 'outdoorsy' people will be quite happy to give you a small amount of soil if you ask politely, say thank you, and especially if you tell them all about your activity and maybe offer to do a little weeding or digging for them as trade-off?

Try not to take soil from the very top of the ground, this will have lots of dead and decaying material in and it doesn't have the right consistency for monsters.

You will need to collect your soil from a little bit deeper, anywhere from about 8cms to 15cms (3-6inches) or sometimes a little deeper will probably be good. Don't worry about measuring if you think of the size of an ordinary ball point pen is around 15cms long that will give you an idea of how far to dig - you don't need a hole that looks like you're trying to reach China! You should notice the soil will have a slightly different colour; likely to be denser (it should remind you of a chewy chocolate bar from the inside - DON'T be tempted to eat it though - yuck) and be squishy not crumbly.

Put enough soil in your container to make a large hand-sized blob. Add water slowly in small splashes, then stir and mix. When the mixture starts to get clumpy that's when you need to start to use your hands, NOTE: if you are really squeamish or have a skin complaint rub some hand lotion or barrier cream that you usually use on your hands and wear re-useable gloves (like washing up gloves) You won't get quite the same sensory effect but you'll still have loads of fun!

You will know when your mud is ready - try to stick it to a tree or building (again ask first!) if it sticks its ready. Too wet? Add a bit more soil. Too dry? Add a bit more water! Play with the mud and experiment; do you like wet mud or sticky mud best?

Think about what kind of muddy monster you want to create. Will it be happy, friendly, hungry, scary, or silly? Does it need hair, spikes, eyes, mouth or teeth? Where will it live? It's your creature so whatever you decide is fine! Collect any additional items you fancy to 'decorate' your creation, if you are in a garden or out and about you might collect flowers, twigs, small fir cones, 'conkers', acorns, sycamore seeds (helicopters), feathers, shells, flowers and leaves. Remember our rules about collecting things; ask permission if you need to, don't take more than you need; don't pick wild flowers, if in doubt leave it out (ask or identify beforehand if you are really keen! Look carefully before you collect - some plants can have prickles, thorns and some are poisonous!

Splat your monster on the tree and squash the edges down firmly then shape it to your design. Add your decorations to your monster. Make more, compare with others, and make a whole family. When you've finished just leave it there and see how it 'morphs' over time, make sure you wash Take its photo and send it to us, we LOVE monsters!

Dough Recipe Monsters

Sometimes it's hard to get out and obtain the things you need to do an activity, or the weather is just too awful for your dough monsters to stick to a tree.

Making simple dough from kitchen ingredients can give you nearly the same results as mud monsters and you can stick them up outside and the birds in the garden can eat them.

What's even better with this activity is that you CAN eat it!



NO BAKE CAN BAKE

(If you cook this dough you may need a grown-up to help with the hot oven! BE safe)

You can squash this on a tree and leave this as it is as it will harden, then the birds can peck at it and they will be fine. It's safe to eat or nibble as you play, or you can cook it and gobble it up later for lunch so there's absolutely NO waste. You can keep it in an airtight container and use it day after day like playdough (if you do this we don't recommend cooking it at a later date for human consumption BUT you make bird cookies. See below)

Wash and dry your hands before and after you have completed this activity. Measure the following ingredients:

3 cups flour (375g) (bread flour is best if you are going to eat it, self-raising flour is OK, and even all-purpose/plain flour with a teaspoonful of baking powder works, You can even try with gluten free or wholemeal. You can experiment with the recipe but you're not likely to get fluffy loaf!)

1 cup (250ml) **cold water**

1 tablespoon oil (olive oil, sunflower oil, vegetable or rapeseed oil)

If you have fast-action dried yeast you can add a teaspoon of fast-action dried if you want to cook it as bread. If you fancy you can add chopped herbs, food colouring, spices, raisins, chopped dates, apricots or glace cherries, grated cheese and even a little food colouring to make your monster. If you are going to leave it outside think about the creatures that may eat it so don't add too many spices and no salt!

Flour, water and oil combination alone will make good enough dough to play with and eat! Make more or less mix depending on your needs.

Put all the ingredients in a bowl and mix it thoroughly. When it starts to clump together forming dough, tip it out onto a floured surface (a table) and knead it. Add a little extra flour or water if needed - flour is a natural material, so it may require slightly less water or a bit more flour to get the right consistency. It should be stretchy and bouncy if you poke your finger in it!

You can shape the dough into anything you like circles, squares, funny faces, plaits, letters, numbers, creatures whatever takes your fancy. You can use your hands to model the dough, or use cookie cutters.



If you want to eat the dough monsters when you are finished, put your dough creation on an oiled baking sheet and bake in the oven at around Gas 7 / 220°C / 425°F. How long to bake for will depend on how big your shapes are - 10-15 mins is a rough guide.

When it's done it should have risen slightly and be a little golden on top. Give your dough a tap on the underneath side using your knuckle. If it sounds hollow it should be ready, and if not, pop it back in the oven for a little longer.

Let your bread to cool before you eat it. We put a little butter and jam on ours.



Bird Cookies

If you have had your dough a little while and its beginning to look past its best use it to feed our feathered friends. Roll the dough out until it is flat and is about 1cm deep add some bird seed or scraps of bread and squash this into the dough on the top. Shape it into any way like (you can use cookie cutters if you want, just add a hole to each shape with a straw) or make one large rectangle. Draw lines vertically and horizontally across the rectangle to make small rectangles. At the top of each small rectangle make a hole in the dough using the end of a straw. Cook the dough as advised above. Allow to cool then break up into smaller pieces, Thread string or twine through the hole and then simply hang up outside for the birds to peck at.

If you have ago at any of these ideas - send us copies of your creations, we'd love to see them!