

Age range:



Time needed:



Resources:



Take a look at your clothes to find out where they're made and what they're made of - and find another use for stinging nettles

You will need:

- Nettles
- Gloves
- hammers/mallets (or small logs)

If you have a large group, and lots of time, you could use your cordage to make a string bag. Alternatively, you can use a smaller amount of cordage to make a lanyard. Place items in the bag or hang from the lanyard to test its strength.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1.** Ask young people to take a look at the labels in the clothes they are wearing. What are they made of? Where were they made?
- 2.** Ask if they know how these fabrics are produced. You could ask them to research how cotton, polyester and other common fabrics are made.
- 3.** Discuss some of the problems that these fabrics can cause in the environment, such as the high water use in producing denim, chemicals used in bleaching/dyeing, and microplastic pollution caused by polyester. Ask if anyone knows about more sustainable fibres, such as bamboo.
- 4.** Explain that you are going to try and make your own fabric to understand more about the processes involved.
- 5.** Wearing gloves, carefully pick your nettles from low down the stalk -long, thick stems are best.
- 6.** Strip off the leaves and lay the stems over a flat surface, like a log. Use a mallet to gently bash up and down the length of the stem. Open up the squashed stem, and carefully snap it - the woody centre will break, while the outside flesh will stay intact.



7. Carefully peel the centre away from the skin, and hang the skins up to dry in the sun.

8. Once the stems are dry you are ready to make cordage - dip the dry strands in water to make them more pliable. Just off centre of one of your strands twist in opposite directions to make a loop or eye. Hold your loop in one hand and twist the strand on the right away from you, keeping it twisted bring it over the strand on the left so the strands have swapped sides. Now continue twisting the right strand and passing in front of the left, each time holding further down the forming cordage. With practice you can create a very fine cord, but initially you will end up with quite a chunky piece of string.

9. Get pictures, or source a piece of fabric made from nettle fibres. During the first world war, Germany had limited access to cotton, so made clothing including soldiers uniforms from nettle fibres.

Discuss whether they think this is an option for their clothing, and other ways we can be more sustainable in our fashion choices e.g. buying second hand items, washing items like jeans less often, learning to make our own clothes.

TAKE IT FURTHER...

Making clothes from nettles might not be practical (though in WW1, cotton shortages meant some German uniforms were made from nettle fibres) - but you could discuss with your group what steps we could take to reduce the impact of clothing and fashion on the environment.

Is it more important to take individual actions (like upcycling clothes or washing our jeans less) or campaigning to change a system where clothes are manufactured cheaply and treated as disposable items?