



Toad Abode

Audience/ Group Setting

This activity works well with both large (20 plus) or small groups of kids aged 5-10 years old. Organization of large groups may work best in an assembly line method where kids can move from one station to the next. But be prepared - all ages seem to enjoy this activity!

Goal

To present children with an engaging and environmentally friendly activity that provides a backyard habitat for toads.

Objectives

To understand how toads are beneficial to your backyard, and how the abode provides a suitable habitat for the toad.

Big Idea/ Main Message

This activity educates children about the need for toads and toad habitats in their own backyards.

Conservation Action/ Behavior Addressed

Create amphibian-friendly environments by providing clean water, hiding places, and insects to eat.

Prime amphibian real estate includes leaf litter, rocks, logs, and a source of water - backyard ponds make a great family project

Background Information

Unfortunately, toads often receive a bad rap. They are frequently considered ugly and are avoided because many people believe the myth that toads can transmit warts. Fairy tales are no exception either, as princes are cursed to live as toads, only to be saved by a fair maiden's kiss. The reality however, is that toads cannot give you warts, and that they are already your insect-eating knight-in-shining-armor (no kiss required!).

There are many species of toads that live across the world in almost every habitat imaginable, devouring insects like plump, bottomless pits. Much of what a toad eats are considered pests. By making a toad abode, your backyard will be ready to house its own "round the clock" insect pest control! In fact, one adult toad can eat as many as 10,000 insect pests during the summer months. Even the tadpoles that develop from eggs laid by female toads may feed on countless mosquito larvae.

Materials Needed

One clay pot (per craft); paint or paint pens (bolder colors work better).

Staff

2-4 (depending on how many crafts will be running simultaneously)

Length of Activity

15-20 minutes

Set up

Ahead of time or day of: 30 minutes

Procedures

Kids will paint their own pots with the paints provided. Once the paint has dried, kids may take their pots home, place them in a consistently damp location in their yard, and prop up one side with a small rock. Hopefully, a toad will make the abode their home!

What to do with your abode at home?

Once you have created a toad abode, you need to choose a spot for it to be placed in your yard. Try to find an area of damp dirt that is usually covered by shade during the day. Areas that are frequently watered by sprinklers, near gutter downspouts, or dripping drains on air conditioning units will work great. The moisture and shade will create a nice environment for your new neighbor, and the toad will use the dirt to customize its own bed.

After you have placed the toad abode in your yard, with a little extra care, you can transform your abode into a castle fit for a king. The first step is adding leaf litter to the inside of the abode. This will give the toad something to hide under when temperatures become too hot during the day. Next, take a shallow saucer (at least 6 inches across and 2 inches deep) with gently sloping sides, push it firmly into the dirt until the sides of the saucer are covered, and fill it with water. Now your toad abode has its very own wading pool! This will be a fine place for your abode's future resident to soak. Just be sure to keep the bowl clean, and filled with water during the spring, summer, and fall.

Finishing touches

Now that you have placed the toad abode in your yard, try not to move it too much. You may spook any toads interested in making the abode their home. You will also want to avoid toxic chemicals that are occasionally sprayed on lawns. Toads, like all other amphibians, have very porous skin, and such chemicals can cause harm. If you are fortunate, and a local "insect eater" decides to make your abode its own, you will be able to enjoy your outdoor time with fewer insects, and relax with the amusing sounds of your amphibian friend!

Activity Extensions/Modifications

If paints that require long dry times are used, it may be helpful to setup a drying station near the exit for kids to pick up their abode as they leave the event.

National Science Education Standards

This activity is aligned to the K-8 Life Science Content Standards.

- Population & Ecosystems
- Diversity & Adaptations
- Regulation & Behavior
- Evolution & Equilibrium
- Populations, Resources & Environment
- Natural Hazards
- Systems, Order & Organization