

5 *Nearly Free* Do-It-Yourself PLAYSCAPE PROJECTS

Here are five simple projects to start you on your way toward a multi-sensory natural playscape. They're not difficult or complex. They just take a little bit of creativity and time. Alter them to suit your own needs and licensing requirements. Do you have any parents who could help you? Spirited staff? Don't forget to include children in the process.

1. Sunflower House — This project is about planting sunflowers in a square, circle, or any other shape you'd like, to create a living playhouse for hiding and hanging out. A true 'living' room. Beautiful! You can use plants other than sunflowers, of course. Rows of corn would make a nice set of walls, too. If this year's sunflower experiment works out well and the children love it, you could create a permanent living room by planting trees or shrubs in the same layout. An apple tree house perhaps?

2. Willow Dome — Here's a permanent 'living' room, made from willow. Willow structures have been grown for centuries all over the world. They are remarkably easy and rewarding to plant; I can't think of a better thing to put on a playscape or backyard. The trick is to plant it in WINTER so that when spring rolls around the willow will start sprouting new roots and leaves. As your Willow Dome grows, take cuttings and plant another dome, tunnel, chair, or fence. Wow!

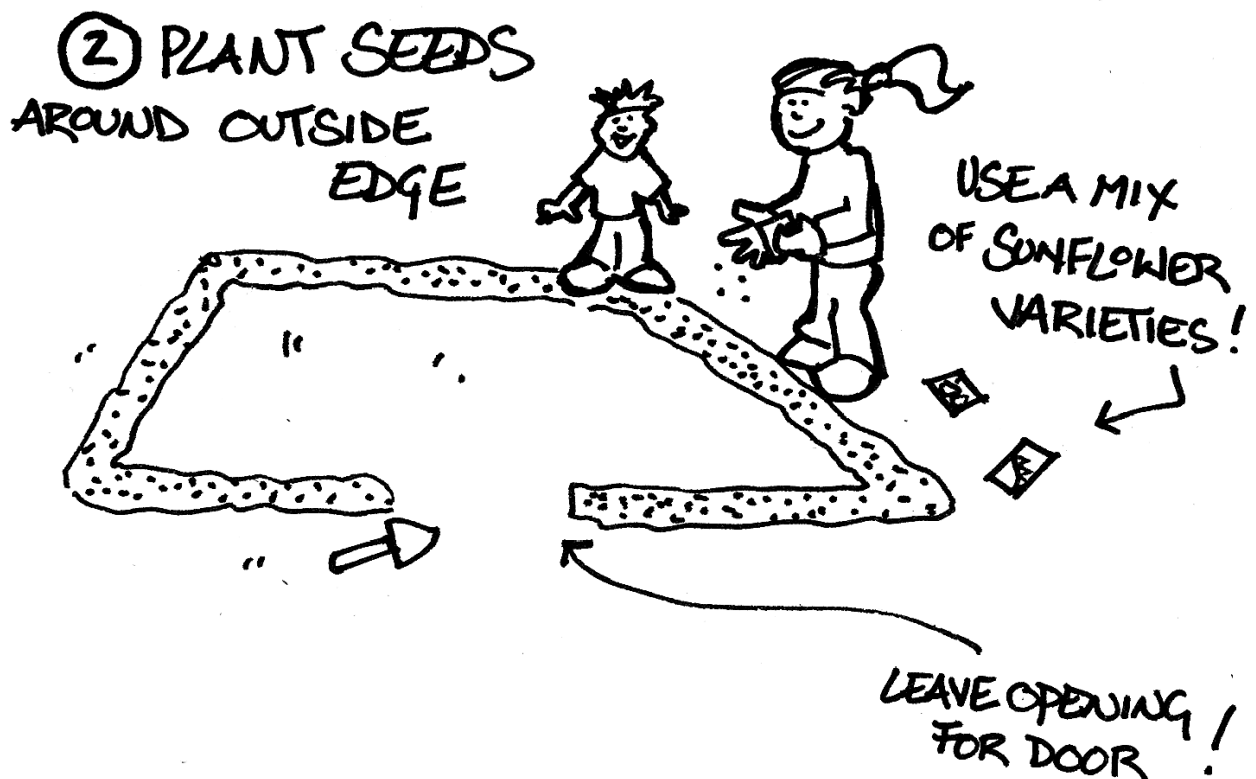
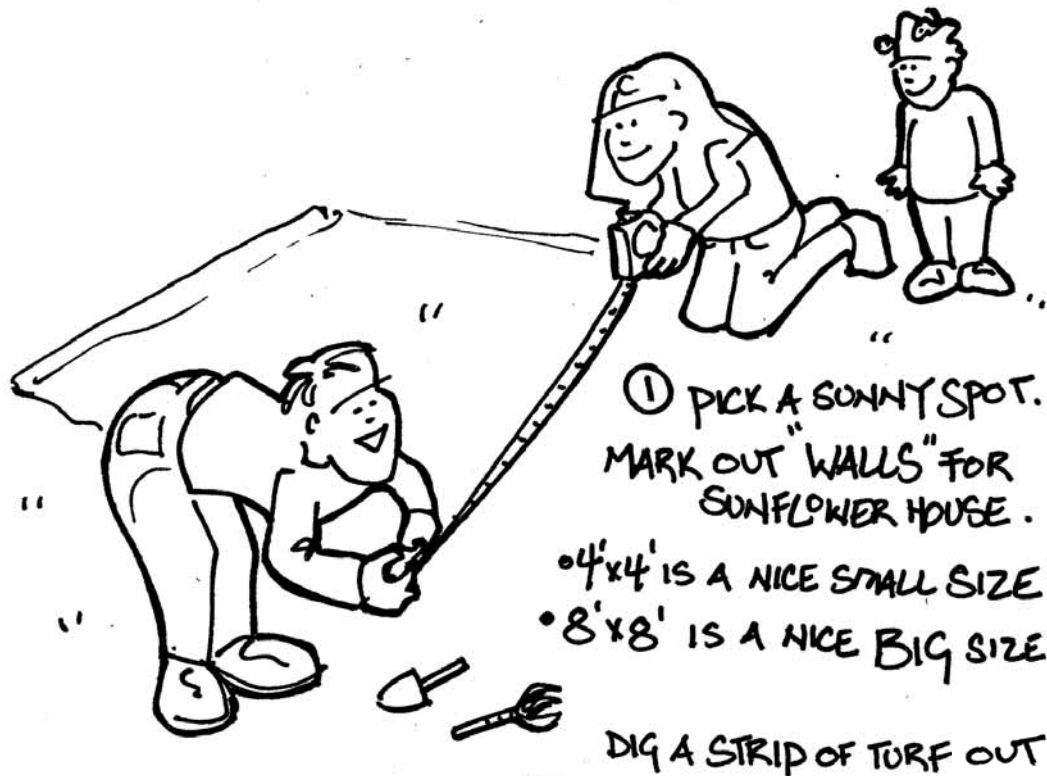
3. Mow a Meadow Maze — This project may be the easiest of all. The biggest step: do nothing. Let your lawn grow. Think about this: your lawn has a beautiful life

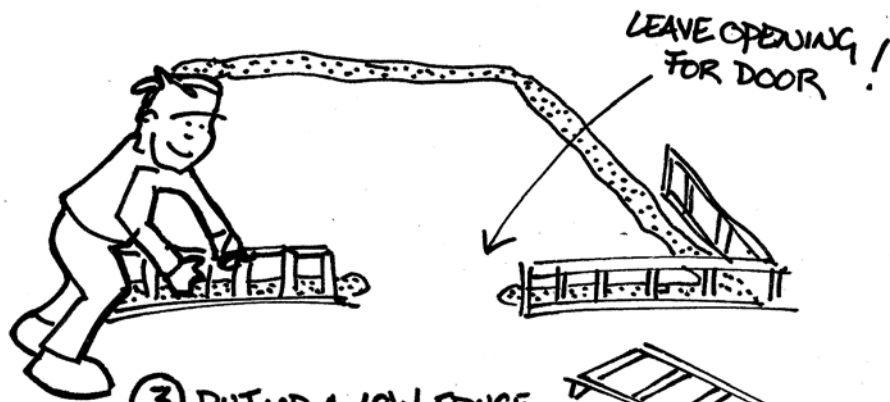
cycle that gets chopped short every time it gets mowed. Now you have a chance to not only celebrate the life of your lawn, but also create a fun, natural play space for your children in the process. With your very own lawnmower as a creative tool, you can carve out a maze, playhouse, village, or zigzaggy paths. You may even want to plant wildflowers or add native plants and grasses. Plants will grow, flowers will bloom, wildlife will appear, and children will play and learn about the natural world in an exciting new environment.

4. Plant Some Bulbs — Planting bulbs is a strange and mysterious experience, especially for children. It sounds crazy, but you take muddy onion/potato-looking things and stick them in the ground at the end of the growing season. Then you wait or forget about them and hunker down for winter. Tick tock tick tock, spring comes along and so does a pleasant surprise. Green shoots push out of the ground and then, before you know it: flowers! Be sure to plant the bulbs in strategic, fun ways that act as colorful accents to your playscape features and pathways.

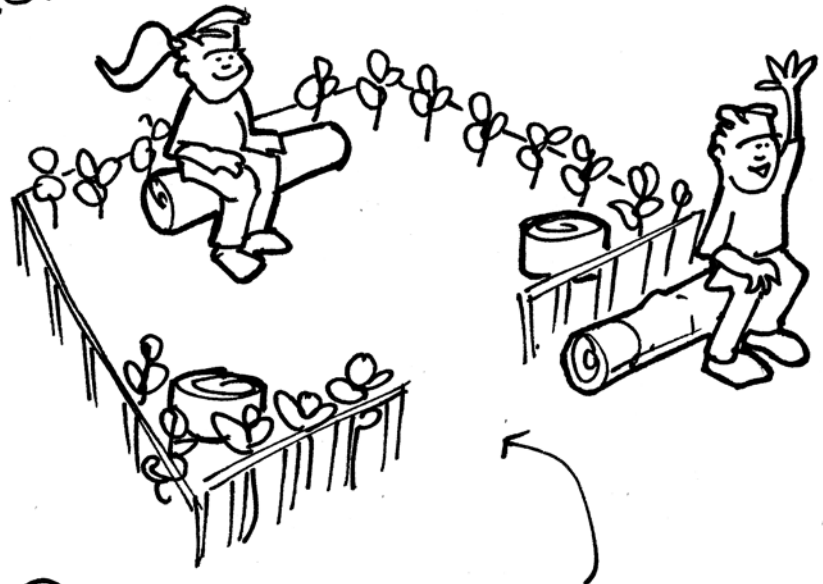
5. Boom Drums — This project is a bit more nuts-and-boltsy, but not too bad. And the results are booming! Take a few plastic barrels. Wash them. Trim them to whatever size you want (experiment with size and sound) and mount legs to the bottoms (or not — they will still sound interesting). You could also mount them permanently in the ground or bolt them to a fence. Or you could build a wooden stage and attach them as permanent features. Boom boom.

Sunflower House

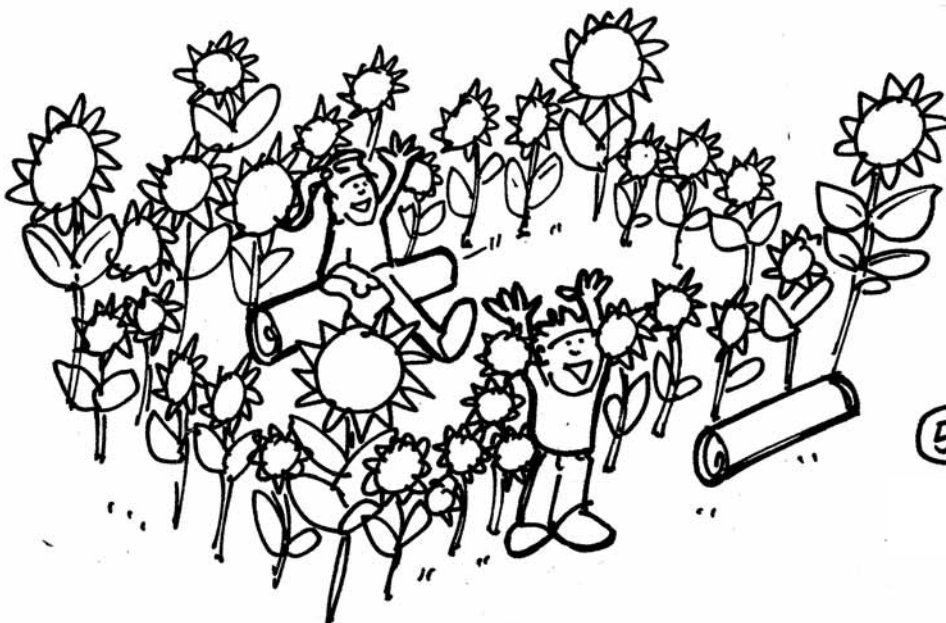




③ PUT UP A LOW FENCE TO MARK THE BORDER AND PROTECT SEEDLINGS.

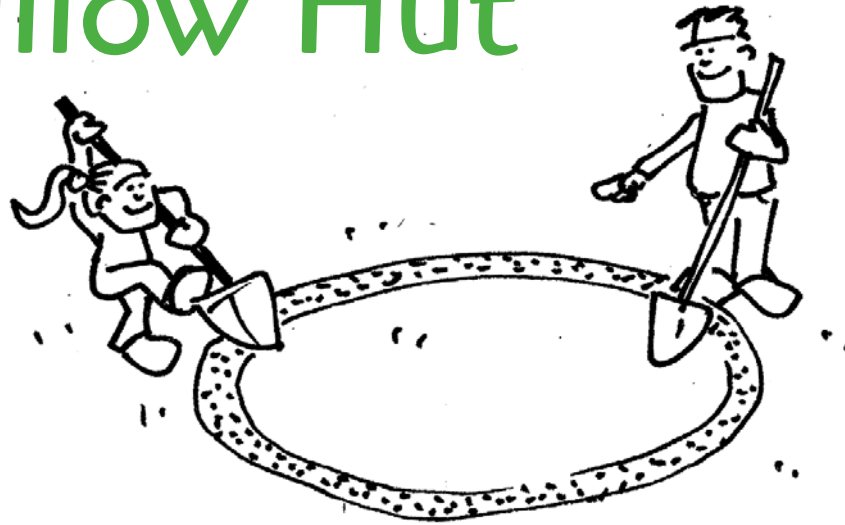


④ PLACE BENCHES & TABLES INSIDE (LOGS & SMOOTH BOULDERS WORK NICELY)



⑤ ENJOY!

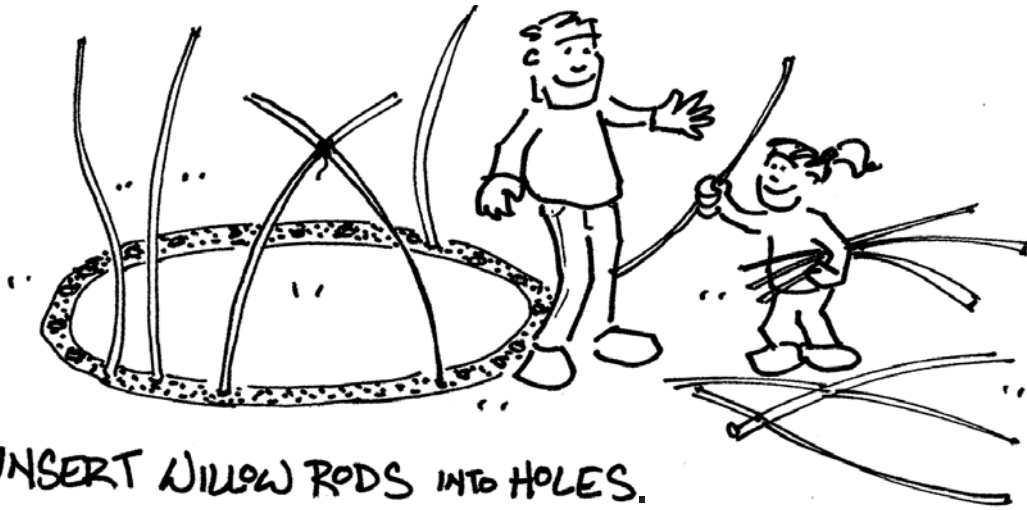
Willow Hut



- ① PICK A SUNNY SPOT. MOIST SOIL IS BEST.
(BUT WILLOW IS HARDY & TOLERANT OF ALL CONDITIONS)
- ② MARK OUT SIZE & SHAPE FOR DOME.
(A 6' DIAMETER CIRCLE IS NICE)
- ③ REMOVE TURF WHERE YOU WANT TO PLANT



- ④ POKE HOLES IN THE GROUND 4-6" DEEP
- USE A CROWBAR OR PRY BAR -
DON'T FORGET THE DOORS!
(SPACE HOLES 8"-12" APART)



⑤ INSERT WILLOW RODS INTO HOLES.

* ALMOST ANY TYPE OF WILLOW CAN BE USED, ALTHOUGH VARIETIES OF SALIX VIMINALIS ARE IDEAL BECAUSE THIS SPECIES PRODUCES LONG STRAIGHT RODS.

* ALWAYS PLANT IN WINTER



⑥ TIE WILLOW RODS TOGETHER. WEAVE THEM INTO DIFFERENT PATTERNS FOR STRENGTH — EVEN HORIZONTALLY.

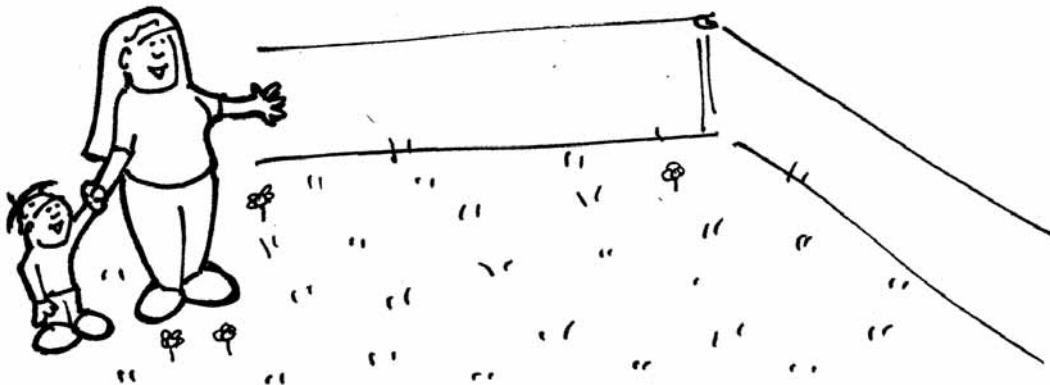


⑦ WATER REGULARLY THE FIRST SUMMER. WILLOW SHOULD BEGIN SPROUTING LEAVES IN LATE SPRING.

⑧ AS WILLOW GROWS, CONTINUE TO WEAVE NEW GROWTH INTO STRUCTURE.

TRIM ANY BRANCH PROTRUDING AT EYE LEVEL

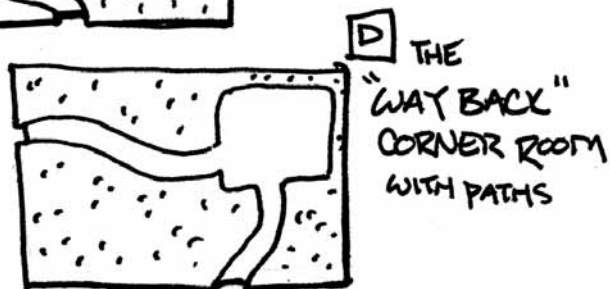
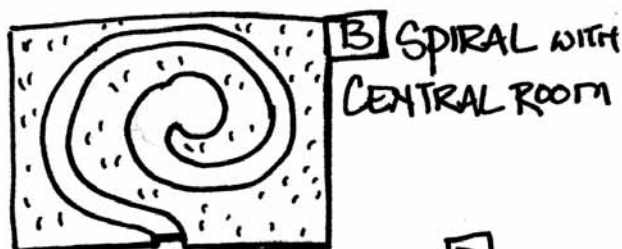
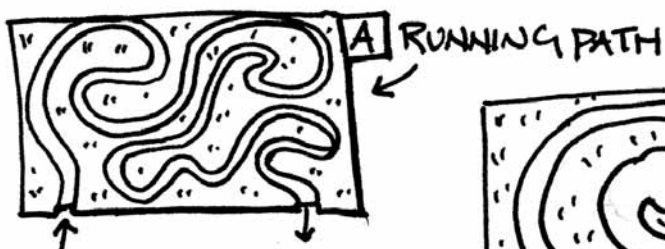
Meadow Maze



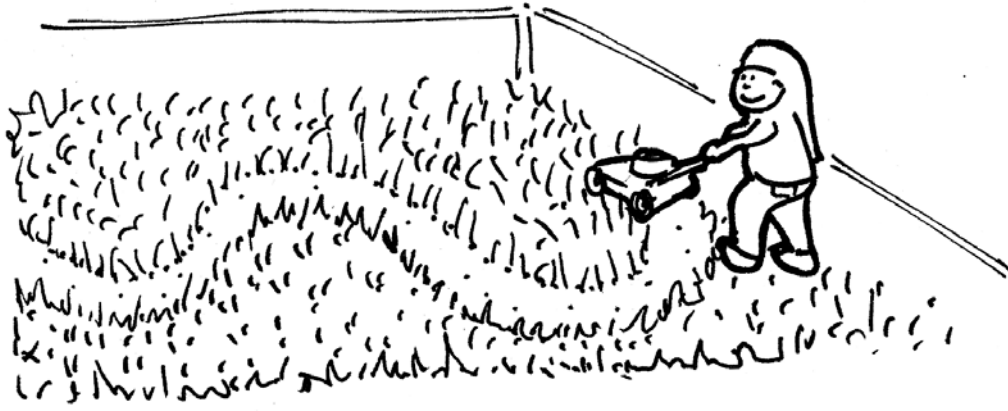
- ① IN ONE PART OF YOUR YARD LET YOUR GRASS GROW LONG!
(YOU MIGHT BE AMAZED AT THE VARIETY OF WILDFLOWERS & NATIVE PLANTS GROWING IN YOUR LAWN WHEN YOU LET THEM GROW & MATURE)
• ADD WILDFLOWER SEED MIX FOR MORE SURPRISES. BE SURE TO LOOK FOR NATIVE SPECIES!

- ② THINK ABOUT THE KINDS OF SPACES YOU WANT TO CREATE. SKETCH THEM ON PAPER. IMAGINE HOW CHILDREN WILL USE THEM FOR PLAY. ANY SIZE OR SHAPE WILL DO. HAVE FUN!

Top View



③



MOW YOUR PATHS OR "ROOMS" INTO THE LAWN.

PUT BENCHES, LOGS & OTHER FUN STUFF IN THE ROOMS & STOP OFF PLACES ALONG THE PATH



④ KEEP PATHS MOWED LOW.

ALLOW THE MEADOW PLANTS TO GROW TO THEIR NATURAL HEIGHT & SEE THEIR FLOWERS.

-OR- KEEP THE MEADOW TRIMMED TO 18" WITH A WEED-EATER. (OR WHATEVER YOU WANT)

• PLANT FLOWERS & FUN PLANTS AT ENTRANCES.

Fun with Flower Bulbs



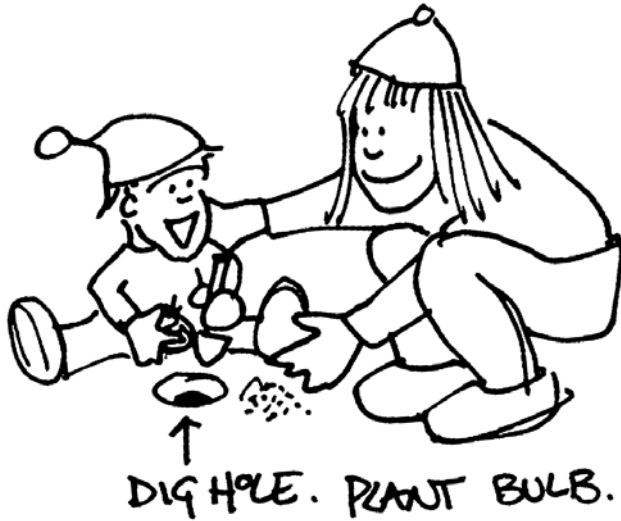
① IN FALL BEFORE FROST INTRODUCE THE IDEA OF BULBS TO THE CHILDREN (YOU PLANT BULBS IN FALL FOR SURPRISE SPRING FLOWERS).



② THINK ABOUT WHERE BULBS SHOULD GO.
→ USE FLOWER BULBS TO MARK PATHS & EDGES OF SPECIAL AREAS—FOR FUN!

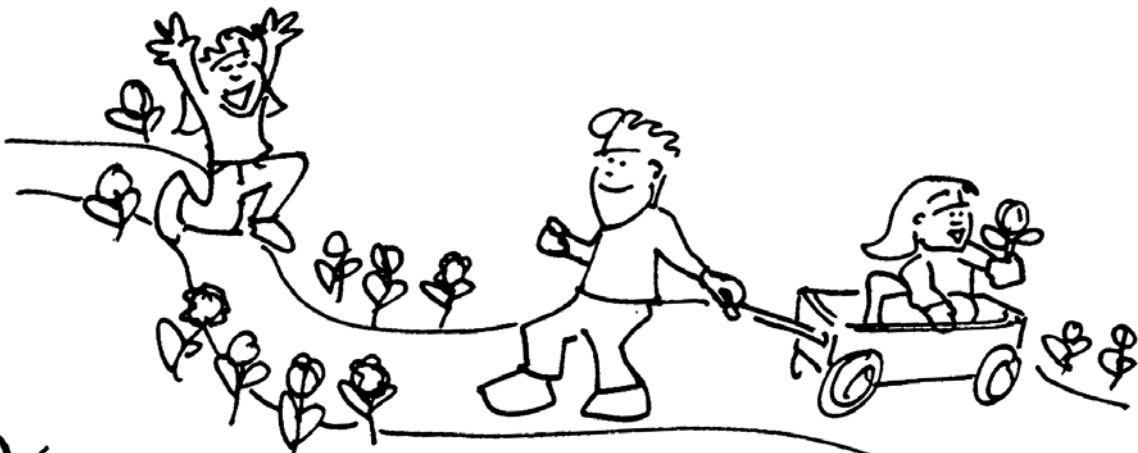
③ PLANT BULBS WITH CHILDREN.

- PICK VARIETIES FOR COLOR & FRAGRANCE
(SOME BULBS HAVE MILD TOXICITY. OTHERS GET EATEN TOO EASILY BY ANIMALS. CHOOSE CAREFULLY!)



④ FORGET ABOUT BULBS OVER WINTER.

⑤ HAVE A FUN SURPRISE IN SPRING!!



⑥ KEEP A "BULB PATROL JOURNAL" KEEPING TRACK OF FLOWERS' GROWTH & CHANGES - AND - OBSERVATIONS BY THE CHILDREN.

Boom Drums



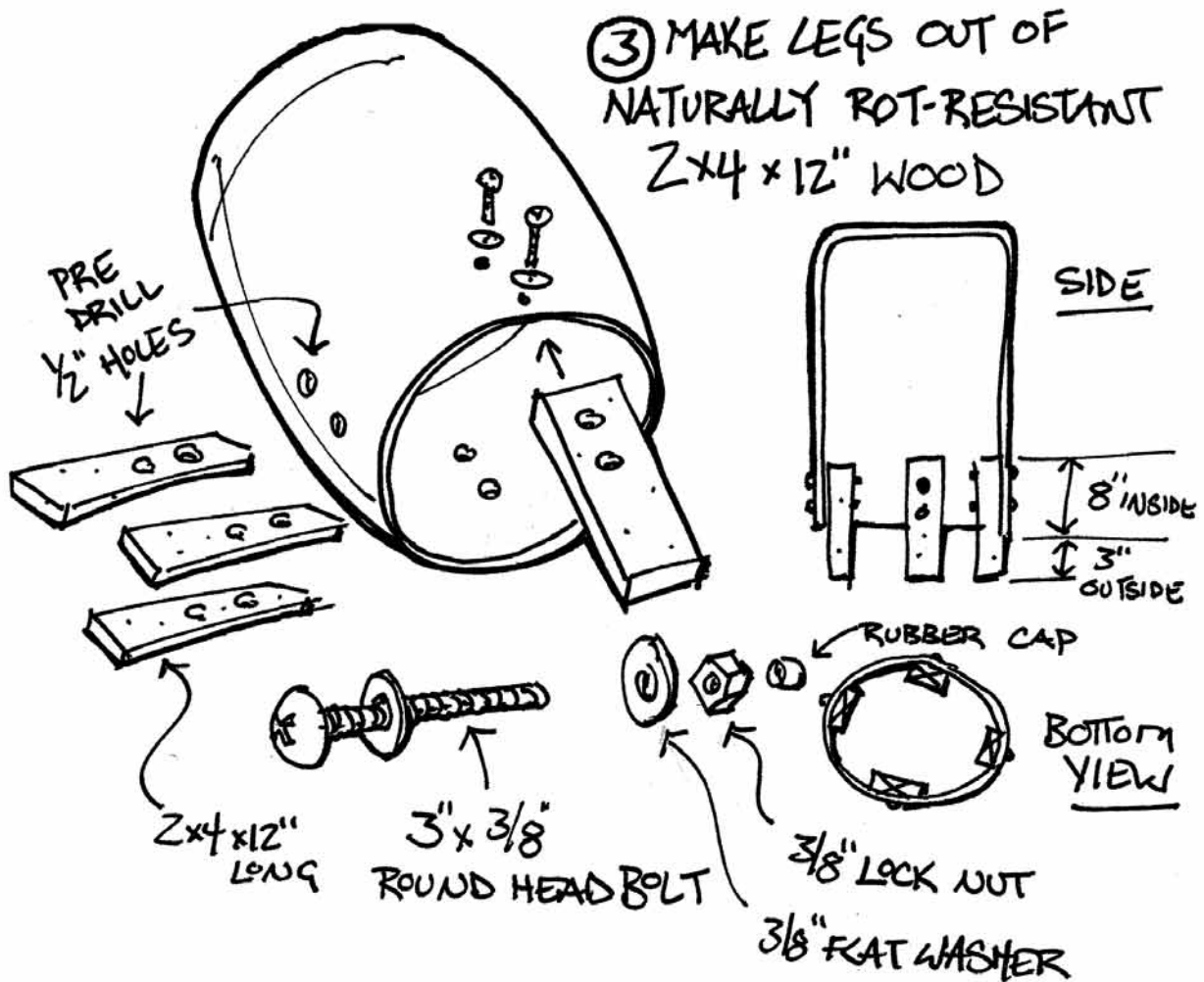
- ① OBTAIN PLASTIC 55 GALLON BARRELS.
(SOMETIMES FREE FROM CAR WASHES)
• WASH THEM, INSIDE & OUT



- ② MEASURE & CUT BARRELS WITH SKILL SAW
TO DIFFERENT LENGTHS (FOR DIFFERENT TONES).



- WEAR SAFETY GOGGLES
& DUST MASK!



- 4 LEGS EACH
- 2 BOLTS FOR EACH LEG - ROUND SIDE OUT
- TRIM BOLT ON INSIDE IF EXCESS STICKS OUT BEYOND NUT (BARRELL THICKNESSES MAY VARY)

