

# tender leaf diaries

for growing minds

meet sam, 6,  
chef

also in this issue



learning  
among  
the leaves



the secret  
science  
of play





# for growing minds

dylan, 7,  
naturalist

Forest Trail Kit  
Open Ended Play Collection

## Inspiring creative play for generations to come

From first sketches in our London design studio to careful craftsmanship in our family-run factory in Indonesia, every step of the Tender Leaf story is focussed on creating thoughtfully-designed toys that will spark magical, meaningful play for generations of children.

Sustainability is more than just a badge to us – using reclaimed rubberwood and recycled packaging, we work hard to leave a limited trace on the planet. But more than that, our pieces are made to be played with a hundred different ways, then passed on, and on, and on.

## Award-winning toys

We're beyond thrilled to have won two Junior Design Awards, including Gold for Best Toy Brand!

Junior Design Awards 2025

Best Toy Brand: Gold Award

Best Toy Design: Platinum Award



# Q&A

Take a glimpse into ordinary yet learning-packed days with Rachel and her son, Noah.



## Noah, 3

**What makes a day brilliant?** I like playing at home with Mummy. We play with my toys, do drawings, read books and sometimes jump on the sofa!

**What do you and Mummy play together?** We go in our pretend vehicles – driving our beds! Mummy does funny voices for my toys and makes ramps for my vehicles. They go really fast!

**What did you make with the Little Garden Designer set?** I made a gigantic garden for my farm animals with a very long path. A cheeky tractor smashed it all up so we had to build it again!



## Rachel

**What does playtime mean to you?** It means being down on the floor, surrounded by toys. We whizz trains round tracks, rescue heroes from baddies, build dens from cushions... there's never a dull moment! After busy mornings outside, I love calm activities like reading or painting. In these moments, I see – and feel – his contentment.

**What makes this time so special?** I read about some women in their 80s who said that if they could, they'd go back and relive one ordinary day with their young children. That stayed with me. Noah won't remember every game we play, but I know this time

is helping him grow, feel free and explore the world. I'll treasure these memories forever.

**Which toy do you both enjoy playing with?** Noah was instantly curious about the Little Garden Design set – it's different to anything we've played with before. He tipped all the pieces out of the box and played with its slidey lid, then we built gardens side-by-side. Noah soon added in vehicles and more animals, including it in his wider world of imaginary play.



**Garden Designer**  
Open Ended Play Collection

# the secret science of play

Have you ever noticed your child playing in the same way over and over and over again? They could be demonstrating one of nine schemas that can often be seen in early childhood play.



We Are Family Dolls  
Dolls House Collection

## All in a line

Carefully making rows and patterns from play people, blocks and cars is known as **positioning** and is a helpful way for children to bring order to their world.



## Cosy and contained

The **enveloping** schema – wrapping things up, putting toys to bed and making dens – is a way for children to develop what feels safe and comfortable to them.



## Schemas are a playful way of testing how the world works.

When you see a child carefully lining up toys, throwing anything they can get their hands on or spinning themselves round and round, you could be witnessing schemas in action. And it's just one of the reasons that open-ended toys are so crucial – because they can be played with in countless different ways!

By repeating these playful patterns, children are testing ideas, building confidence and discovering what their bodies, toys and other objects can do. Over time, these experiments build real understanding of their world.

Find out more about four play schemas below. Have you spotted children you know using any of these patterns?

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schema play  
is how our  
**CHILDREN**  
learn to make  
**SENSE**  
of the world

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### Handful of fun

Some children love **transporting** – that's carrying things from place to place. This schema helps with developing movement, planning and cause and effect.



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### Hide and seek

Putting toys in contained areas (like fenced fields and dolls houses) is part of the **enclosing** schema. This can help children to explore setting boundaries and feeling secure.





Rowan Wynne-Jones  
of Dig and Delve  
Forest School

# learning among the leaves

milo, 3,  
carpenter

From muddy play sessions to full-time outdoor education settings, Forest School is taking root. We asked Rowan to tell us what makes it so special.

At forest school, children explore and learn in nature, through nature and sometimes about nature. It's not a sterile, bubble-wrapped environment: we're out in the real world, playing freely, feeling mud and twigs and leaves, balancing on logs, swinging in hammocks and climbing trees.

Some purist forest schools only provide a tarpaulin and a firestarting kit, but I like to bring books, instruments, bug hunting kits and toys into the woods. And you'll never see me without a ball of wool – there's so much you can do with it! At Dig and Delve, we have guttering propped on logs and branches. Children experiment with rolling balls, acorns, conkers, whatever they can find, down them.

Everything we do in the forest is led by the child. Sometimes we teach a skill or set up activities, like tying knots, building dens or modelling with clay, but the child can decide how to take part. They assess their own boundaries and level of risk based on how their bodies feel. It's incredible to watch what they're working through and how skills develop at the child's own pace. This time in the forest helps in so many ways – the fresh air, the microbes in mud that help your gut, the increased connection with nature... it's endless. It's such a privilege to see children benefitting from everything that the forest offers.

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incredible skills  
**CONFIDENCE**  
and curiosity  
can all be awakened by  
**EXPLORING**  
the forest

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### My Forest Floor

Open Ended Play Collection

See how real leaves, seeds, flowers and fungi look through the year.



### Bug Hotel

Educational Collection

A chance to handle creatures in a safe and kind way.

From a bus ride to the park to zooming across the world, packing well-chosen toys turns travel into adventure. Tucked into back seats, backpacks or suitcases, these playsets make the minutes and miles fly by.



**Stacking Farmyard**  
Farm Collection



**Airline Meal Tray**  
Role Play Collection



**Clever Cat Memory Game**  
Games Collection

with  
**PACK  
AWAY  
BAG**



jamie, 5,  
photographer

with  
compass  
& water  
bottle

**Safari Adventure**  
Open Ended Play

Discover wild beasts, wherever you are!

This easy-to-carry kit contains everything a young explorer could need.



## Safari Adventure Camera

Open Ended Play Collection



handy  
penknife and  
real compass

## Peacock Colours

Toddler Collection

Filtering the harsh light of airports and train stations through coloured lenses transforms overwhelming spaces into calm, manageable ones. Children can choose how they see new environments by switching colours, letting them take control of the world around them.



## Doctors Bag

Caring Collection

Perfect for housecalls



our people

# meet danielle hanson



Tender Leaf's designer talks about inspiration and process

**I had a dream of creating beautiful, genuinely sustainable textiles, toys and furniture for children.**

Before taking the leap to start Tender Leaf, I worked at the BBC, then trained as an art teacher while raising my three children. More recently, I was Creative Director for a wooden toy company, but I wanted the freedom to design textiles too. I've always wanted to make things that would be kept for future generations.

**In the classroom, I learned that all children are different.**

I saw it in my own children, too. It's so important to pique children's curiosity, to show them beauty in the natural world as well as in the arts, to understand how they learn, what motivates them, and encourage them to discover their strengths.

**Every new toy takes a lot of thought and imagination.**

It all starts with a sketch. My studio is filled with inspiration,

from my favourite childhood toy, a Pippa doll (I love a bit of vintage plastic) to my huge collection of illustrated children's books. I love the design process, illustrating and time spent researching. I take a very personal approach – I want to create beautiful toys in contemporary colours with quirky details for children to discover. That's something that makes Tender Leaf toys different.

**Our family-run factory in Indonesia is astounding.**

Every year, I spend a couple of months working, eating and making gorgeous toys alongside the wonderful people there. From shaping raw wood to hand painting and packing, every stage of the process happens in this factory. It employs hundreds of local people, providing them with high standards of training, wellbeing and respect.

**Protecting our natural resources is crucially important to me.**

Tender Leaf toys are only made from reclaimed rubberwood – and I'm lucky enough to have





Musical Table  
Open Ended Play Collection

visited the tree plantations myself. We use trees that were planted to make latex but have come to the end of their useful life, and for every one we use, we plant a new one. We've been awarded the ICTI Ethical Toy Program seal of approval for our ethical and sustainable supply chain.

**I'm so proud of toys that were inspired by my love of woodlands and nature.**

The Forest Floor set and Forest Trail kit are open-ended toys that encourage independent and imaginative play, allow the child to explore, and appeal to any age or gender. I'm very excited about producing more open-ended play toys that encourage creative thinking.



Stacking Forest  
Stacking Collection

“  
it all starts with  
**A SKETCH**  
”



welcome to  
*merrywood  
tales*

Next time you pass by Granny's dresser, a washed-up pile of recycling or an old sewing box, take a very good look. Because that empty sardine tin or cracked cup might be something quite different to some magical friends who make their homes around us...

Welcome to the whimsical world of Merrywood Tales.

**Shepherd's Hut**  
Merrywood Tales Collection



~

*Found in a corner, forgotten or lost,  
A spool of thread is gathering dust.  
Mabel spots it and grabs it and rolls it away  
Squeaking, 'A mouse-sized stool, hip hip hooray!'*



*Back at her home, a sweet Shepherd's Hut,  
Baby Boo splish-splashes in an old china cup.  
At bedtime, Otto dries her and tucks her in  
To her cot – a borrowed anchovy tin!  
The treasures found by these adventurous mice,  
Have furnished their home and made it so nice.*



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# B

ring the enchanting world of Merrywood Tales to life

Build a gorgeous, tiny world for the creatures of Merrywood Tales among wild flowers, ferns and leaves.



A magical world for children



otilie, 2,  
scientist

*A play  
kitchen is crucial  
in every Early  
Years setting*



# home from home

Lisa McKie runs Sunflowers Preschool Playgroup for children aged 1.5 to 5 years

The home corner is a safe environment where every child wants to play.

You see all of the prime areas of learning at work in the play kitchen: children pour, mix, sort, use their imaginations and chat together, quietly and kindly. A confident child might say to a quieter one, 'Why don't you put some cups on the table while I cook tea?' They work together and no one is left out. These little moments build self esteem.

Recently, some children threw a birthday party in the kitchen, baking cakes and bursting into song. They know what to do, because they've seen it at home.

The knives are used to carefully chop food into different shapes. The smoothie maker gets filled to the brim with everything!



Children gain confidence when they're doing things they've seen grown ups do.

Two older boys turned the kitchen into a barber shop, using tongs as scissors and a spatula as clippers. It was absolutely brilliant and totally spontaneous. As adults, we have to be careful not to look too hard because it stops that natural play.

There's a constant stream of children playing with the kitchen, so it needs to be versatile. I love giving children lots of free play, a chance to get into their flow. That's where the magic happens.

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**It's really  
IMPORTANT  
to me that I  
CHOOSE TOYS  
that are going  
to last**

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# inspiring ways to grow their play

noah, 3,  
pilot



## Extend the fun and learning with Tender Leaf's bespoke collection of printable activities

Did you know that our website is packed with thoughtfully-designed crafts, games, seasonal projects and more? Spark even more play with this collection of over 200 activities – simply print, add basic craft supplies and a little imagination, and enjoy!



Craft extra props to use alongside Tender Leaf toys...

...or complete standalone activities, fun for everyone!

**Polar board game** tender leaf printables

Who will be the first to help the Polar Bear reach his cub? To play the game, print out this page, grab a dice, 2 - 4 players and counters, (we used our wooden animals from our Polar collection!). Take turns rolling the dice to move along the board. The winner is the first to reach the baby bear!

**START**

1 2 Bump into a killer whale! Go back 2.

3 4 An owl tells you a shortcut! Move 5 spaces.

5 6 Stop for a chat with a penguin! Miss a turn!

7 8 A reindeer gives you a ride! Move on 4 spaces.

9 10 Help a rabbit find some food! Take another turn!

11 12 Oh no! A narwhal blocks your path! Move back 3 spaces.

13 14 A grumpy walrus knocks you off your iceberg! Move back 5 spaces.

15 16 17 18 19 20 **FINISH**

love wood & play ... tender leaf

**Canal boat craft** tender leaf printables

Grab an empty drink carton and turn it into this dreamy canal boat! Paint a drink carton any colour you want for the base colour of your boat. Next, carefully cut around the dashed lines below and use them to decorate your boat as we have here!

Share your creation with us! #tenderleafprints

Here's one we made!

Top tip! Carefully cut a rectangular hole in the top of your carton so the top...

love wood & play ... tender leaf

**Bug buddies** tender leaf printables

Create some beautiful bug buddies with this print out. Ideally print this page onto card or stick some card before carefully cutting along the dashed lines. Have all you need are some brightly coloured pipe cleaners to use as long legs like we have here!

Share your creations with us! #tenderleafprints

Top tip! No pipe cleaners? No worries! Use strips of card to use as legs instead or pieces of wool.

Here's some we made!

love wood & play ... tender leaf



**Threadbear Toys & Gifts and Tender Leaf Toys**

Working together to create and distribute beautifully designed wooden toys and textile gifts in the UK, provide global distribution and maintain the highest ethical standards of manufacture for all our products.

Discover more at [www.threadbeardesign.com](http://www.threadbeardesign.com).

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