



## Fun St. Patrick's Day Learning Activities!



*By Diane Flynn Keith*

St. Patrick's Day arrives on March 17th. Your family is sure to enjoy celebrating the day with these fun learning activities...

"Erin Go Braugh!" means "Ireland Forever!" On St. Patrick's Day the Irish take pride in their heritage and lore as they celebrate the feast day of St. Patrick, Bishop and Patron Saint of Ireland.

There are many legends about St. Patrick. It is said that he was kidnapped by pirates in his native Wales and sold into slavery in Ireland. (Can you find Wales and Ireland on a globe?)



While in servitude, Patrick found his religious faith, and upon gaining his freedom he vowed to spread God's word to all of Ireland. It is said that he used the shamrock to explain the religious concept of the Holy Trinity (three persons in one God).

Here are some ideas for sharing more Irish legend and lore...

### The Wee Folk

Shenanigans are the order of the day, as is the wearin' of the green, to remind people of Ireland, also known as the Emerald Isle.



Irish folklore embraces the wee folk, commonly known as leprechauns. They are fond of music (especially harps and fiddles), and love to dance the Irish jig. They prefer a diet of raw mushrooms and shamrocks washed down with a splash of Irish whiskey. Leprechauns enjoy playing tricks on people, who try to capture them in pursuit of the leprechaun's elusive pot of gold.

My family's observance of St. Patrick's Day included the wee folk. On the eve of St. Patrick's Day, the children carefully prepared a plate of raw

mushrooms and shamrocks and left it out for the elfin people. Then, they went to bed hoping the leprechauns would be pleased with the offering and leave a small treasure as thanks. For their efforts my children were rewarded with gold coins (gold, foil-wrapped, chocolate coin candy), puzzles, games!



The leprechauns couldn't resist playing a few tricks on us though, including switching the sock drawer with the pajama drawer, changing our white brand of toilet paper to green, re-arranging the furniture and turning some of it upside down, and filling our shoes with green confetti-like leprechaun dust. Your family will love finding evidence of elfin handiwork too!



### More St. Patty's Day Activities!

Veteran homeschool mom, **Fran Wisniewski**, compiled all kinds of wonderful activities and crafts to celebrate St. Patrick's Day that you can read at:

[http://www.homefires.com/articles/st\\_paddys\\_day.asp](http://www.homefires.com/articles/st_paddys_day.asp)

Here is her recipe for Irish Soda Bread that has been in her family for 5 generations! The crust is crispy and the middle is soft and delicious. Your kids will enjoy helping you make it.

#### *Ingredients:*

- 3 ½-c flour (sifted)
- ½-c white sugar
- 2 tsp brown sugar
- 1 tsp baking soda
- ½ tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp salt
- 1-c golden raisins
- 1 stick of butter (softened)
- 1-c buttermilk
- 1 egg
- Large bowl
- Aluminum pan (greased and floured)

*Directions:* In a large bowl, add softened butter, flour, white sugar, brown sugar, baking soda, baking powder, and salt. Use your hands to work all of

these ingredients together until the mixture is like fine sand. Add raisins. Put the egg and buttermilk together in a separate bowl and mix with a fork. Add to flour mixture, and mix into a soft dough. Turn this out on a table and knead for 1 minute. Form into a round loaf and put into the prepared aluminum pan. With a knife, put a cross on the top of the loaf. Cook in a 375 degree oven for 50 minutes or until top is brown and knife comes out clean.

**Note:** Check out Fran's website for all kinds of natural learning ideas for every occasion at: <http://www.FranW.com>



### Great St. Patrick's Day Reads

Available at your library, favorite book store, or Amazon.com

*(Note: I have included my Amazon affiliate link and appreciate your support. )*

#### ***The Leprechaun's Gold* by Pamela Duncan Edwards**

<http://homefires.com/amazon?0064438783>

In this delightful story, two harp players —the generous and good-natured Old Pat, and the mean-spirited braggart Young Tom— vie to be designated the best harp player in Ireland by the King of Ireland himself. Tom uses dirty tricks to win ignoring the distress cries of a leprechaun. Old Pat sets aside the competition to help the poor leprechaun, and in the end his kindness makes all the difference. The illustrations are great fun, and you can search for 16 four-leaf clovers hidden throughout the pages of the book! Recommended for ages 4-8.

#### ***The King of Ireland's Son* by Padraic Colum**

<http://homefires.com/amazon?0486297225>

This is an epic Irish folk tale in chapter book format. The title character makes a heroic journey to regain his life from an evil Enchanter. He faces many trials and beats insurmountable odds along the way. Love, friendships and foes, magic, giants, witches, and triumph of good over evil are all encompassed in the tale. Recommended for children ages 4-10.



## ***That's What Leprechauns Do by Eve Bunting***

<http://homefires.com/amazon?0547076738>

What do leprechauns do? They bury a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, of course. But as Mrs. Bally Bunion's ox, Miss Maude Murphy's hen, and Old Jamie soon find out, they can't resist having a little fun along the way. For, besides burying pots of gold, mischief is what leprechauns do! From this amazing picture book comes a lively fun tale that's perfect for mischief-makers of all ages!

## ***A Decorative Science Experiment: Make Green Carnations!***

Dye your own carnations as a biology lesson for the kids! This simple experiment provides floral decorations while demonstrating how water and food are transported through plant stems.

### *Materials List:*

- white carnations with long stems
- clear vase or jar
- green food coloring
- scissors
- water



### *Directions:*

Cut approximately 1-2" off of the bottom of the carnation stems. Fill the vase or jar 3/4 of the way up with water. Add enough green food coloring to make the water a deep emerald green color. Place the carnations in the vase (stem-end in the water), and let stand for 48 hours.

### *Results:*

After 48 hours the flowers will have changed color from white to green. Why? The Carnation flower stems have tiny tubes inside called "xylem" that extend up the stalk to the flower petals. The green water flows through the xylem allowing the color to be distributed throughout the cells in the petals causing their color to change. In the same way, food or nutrients in the soil are carried to the plant cells providing food for flowers and leaves—and that's no blarney!

## An Irish Movie and a Refreshing Magical Beverage!

Wrap up your celebration with a family screening of **Disney's Darby O'Gill and the Little People** <http://homefires.com/amazon?B0001I55S1>



starring a very young, Sean Connery – who sings! You can probably pick up a copy at your local library or video store.

Darby O'Gill is an estate caretaker, but in his advanced years he's more fond of telling tall tales about the wee folk than keeping the grounds. A new man (Sean Connery) is sent in to take his place, and O'Gill doesn't know what will become of himself and his daughter. He snags three spectacular opportunities, however, when he catches the king of the leprechauns.

### Darby O'Gill Beverage Recipe

Enjoy the movie while sipping our family's favorite St. Patrick's Day beverage – a Darby O'Gill!



Place a drop or two of green food coloring into a clear glass and fill it with crushed ice. Then, gather the children around and pour 7-Up or Sprite into the glass. The oohs and ahhs of watching the "magic" of a clear beverage turn green right in front of their eyes is worth the little effort. Garnish with a green maraschino cherry or a sprig of fresh green mint.

### Fun with Potatoes!

Potatoes are a staple of the Irish diet, so here are some fun ways to learn using potatoes.

**Potato Hunt** — Go to the grocery store or farmer's market and look for different kinds of potatoes. There are white, red, brown, purple, and Yukon gold potatoes, to name a few. Talk about the different names, varieties, colors, shapes, and sizes. Buy a few of each kind to use in the following activities and experiments. Don't forget to cook one of each variety. Have a taste test. Can you taste the difference?



## Grow a Potato!

What has eyes, but cannot see? A potato!

Do your children know that a potato has "eyes." That's just another word for the little white spots that are sprouts or buds on the potato. Did you know that if you plant the pieces of the potato with "eyes" on them, they will grow? Here's how to do it....



Cut a chunk of the potato that has an "eye" on it, and put it in a pot filled with potting soil. Cover it with 1/2" of soil. Water it whenever the soil gets dry, and keep it in the sunshine. Soon your potato plant will grow. The actual potatoes grow below ground, but the leaves and stem grow above ground. When your plant gets big enough, transplant it outdoors into the garden. Soon, you may harvest potatoes!

## Potato Science Experiment!

If you have some old potatoes, the "eyes" may have sprouted. You can use a sprouted potato to show your child how a plant seeks the light of the sun in order to grow (it's called phototropism -- in Greek "photo" means light and "trope" means turn).

Take a shoebox and poke a round hole (approximately 1" in diameter) in one end of the shoebox. Put the sprouted potato at the opposite end (from the hole) of the shoebox. Put the lid on the box, secure it with duct tape (so that light doesn't "leak" through the lid) and set the box in a sunny spot with the hole facing the light. The idea is that the light should be coming in from the hole only. Now you wait.



Count how many days until you see the sprout growing out of the hole in the box, in search of light. If you want, you can do this experiment with 3 or 4 different potatoes (one for each member of the family). Everyone can put their potato-in-a-box in a different window of the house. Have a race to see whose potato finds the light first!

## Read About Potatoes

An interesting children's book that presents facts about the life cycle of various plants including the potato is, ***From Eye to Potato (How Things Grow)*** by Ellen Weiss. <http://homefires.com/amazon?0531187888>

### Make Green Mashed Potatoes!

Show your children how to prepare mashed potatoes with an old-fashioned potato masher (fun!). Add some green food coloring for a festive dish.

#### Ingredients:

4-5 large baking potatoes (about 2 pounds), peeled and quartered  
 2 Tablespoons of butter, melted  
 1 cup of milk, heated (not boiled)  
 Salt and Pepper  
 Green Food Coloring



#### Directions:

1. Fill a pot with water, add a dash of salt, and bring it to a boil. Carefully add the potatoes and cook until tender. (About 15-20 minutes.)
2. Drain the potatoes, leaving them in the cooking pot.
3. Add the melted butter to the potatoes.
4. Using a potato masher (or electric beater) slowly mash the potatoes, blending the milk into the potatoes until smooth and creamy. Season with salt and pepper to taste.
5. Stir in some green food coloring for green mashed potatoes. Yum!

### Make Potato Prints!

You can turn a potato into a stamp to make fun designs. Depending on a child's ability, parents may have to make the "potato stamps" and then just let the children use them to transfer designs onto paper.

To make a potato stamp just cut a baking potato in half and using a pencil, draw a design on the potato cut surface of the potato. Start with simple shapes – clover, heart, star, triangle, etc.

You can use the pencil to actually carve a design in the potato too, but if more detail is required, an adult should cut around the pencil design with a knife.



Place some tempera paint on a paper plate. Dip the potato design into the paint and firmly press it onto paper. Repeat as many times as desired.

## Happy St. Patrick's Day!