

AUTUMN

in the Natural Alt
Pirineu Natural Park
Play along with the
seasons!



Explora el Parc
Parc Natural
de l'Alt Pirineu



THE AUTUMN MAGICIAN₁

"Oh dear, I won't make it! And there I was sunning myself when the call came, and now I have to run like the hammers to catch the train before it leaves," the autumn magician thought to himself as he belted along the road in his long brown travelling cloak. He was carrying a rucksack with four outside pockets on his back. It contained all the bits and bobs he needed to make the autumn. He was going so fast, and was so distracted with thinking he might miss his train, he didn't notice that with every long stride he took leaves were fluttering out of the open top of main part of the rucksack and falling to the ground behind him, as if there was somebody in there tossing them out for fun.

"Hold on please. Wait for me. Don't leave me here,' he shouted to the the engine driver when he puffed and panted into the station and out onto the platfrom, where the train was about to depart, so that he had to jump onto it with one almighty leap of his long legs, and it immediately blew a long blast on its steam whistle, and lurched into motion.

When he was settled in his seat, he put his rucksack on the seat in front of him and patted its four big, bulging pockets one by one from the outside, without opening them, as if he was checking something.

"That's good," he said when he finished. "I think I have everything. I'll just check again that I have the water. Last year I forgot to bring it. Ah, that's ok. Here it is. In the pocket on the left.' When he patted that pocket, just to be sure, it slurped lazily from side to side, as if there was really water in it.

"Easy now, easy now," he said out loud to the pocket. "Just hold your horses, you're not wanted yet."

The autumn magician was so tired after his year of travelling round the world that he put the rucksack on the seat beside him, settled his head on it, and fell fast asleep. Some time later, a good while later, he heard the shrill of a stationmaster's whistle, and then the train's conductor shouting out a name, and he knew he was at his destination.



He grabbed up his rucksack, strapped it to his back, and rushed off the train in a fierce hurry.

Once out of the station he surveyed the wide panorama that opened before him of towns and fields and forests and hills, with the last of the summer sun blazing down on it, and stretched out his long arms as if to embrace it all, as if it was home.

"Must get a move on," he muttered to himself. "Time and the tides of autumn wait for no man."

He was in a hurry because he personally had to transform all that greenness of parks, and gardens, and fields, and forests, using only what he had in his rucksack. With the magic workmates he kept in there he was going to cool everything down, he was going to put warmer clothes on everyone, and especially on the children, and he was going to wet the earth right through again, after the long, hot summer.

"Oh dear," he said, as he started to walk southwards, sweating in his long brown travelling cloak. "It's far too hot here, but I'll soon fix that."

With that he took off his rucksack, set it on the ground, and opened one of the pockets, and out came wind, lots of wind, all kinds of wind ...

"That's more like it," he said, as his ragged brown overcoat began to flap and blow around him, and his long white hair wrapped around his face. "It's whole lot fresher now, so it'll be a nice temperature for my next little friends to do their work."

With that he leaned down and opened a second pocket of the rucksack, and a troop of squirrels ran out, leaping and bounding away, with their long tails straight behind them, until they reached the woods, and started climbing up the trees, and dashing here and there among the branches, and shaking them, to make a shower of golden-coloured leaves fall to the ground below.

The wind scattered the leaves through the undergrowth, and blew harder to make more leaves fall. The squirrels jumped down from the trees to play in the wonderful leaf litter, tossing and turning and churning the leaves, reddish ones, and yellowish ones, and brownish ones, as if the leaves were on fire.

"I know how I'll fix that," the autumn magician thought to himself. He leaned down and opened the third pocket of the rucksack, and clouds of water poured out, and rose into the sky, and poured down as rain, to soak the fallen leaves and the earth beneath them, and fill the air with those special autumn smells that the autumn magician loved so much.

And then he said, out loud, speaking to the rucksack as if it was a person, "Well, what do you think, is it not beautiful?"

"We suppose it is, because it always is, but we can't see any of it from in here," a chorus of little voices wailed from the fourth pocket. "Let us out, please, Mister Autumn Magician. We want to be part of it too."

These were the voices of the nuts, hazelnuts, walnuts, chestnuts, and all kinds of other nuts, and fruits, haws, apples, pears, rose-hips and all kinds of other fruits, clamouring to get out to do their bit for autumn.

The autumn magician opened that last pocket, and out the nuts and the fruits flew, as he shouted to them, "Go on, now, all of you, go and hang yourselves up in those trees and bushes, and when you're good and ripe and ready, fall to the ground to wait for the spring, when you will get your chance to grow, my little hearties."

Over slow weeks and months the autumn magician wandered through the land, moving south as the sun sank lower in the sky, with the pockets on his rucksack always open and the wind and the cold and the rain flowing out of them to bring great changes to the world.

In the countryside he left signs of his magic powers everywhere, and in the cities, towns and villages too, everywhere that he passed: mists, bare branches on trees, drifts of dead leaves with mushrooms growing in them, frosts, new sounds, new smells, as he did every year.

He looked around him as he wandered, and was pleased with his work, and all the work the helpmates he carried in the pockets of his rucksack were doing.

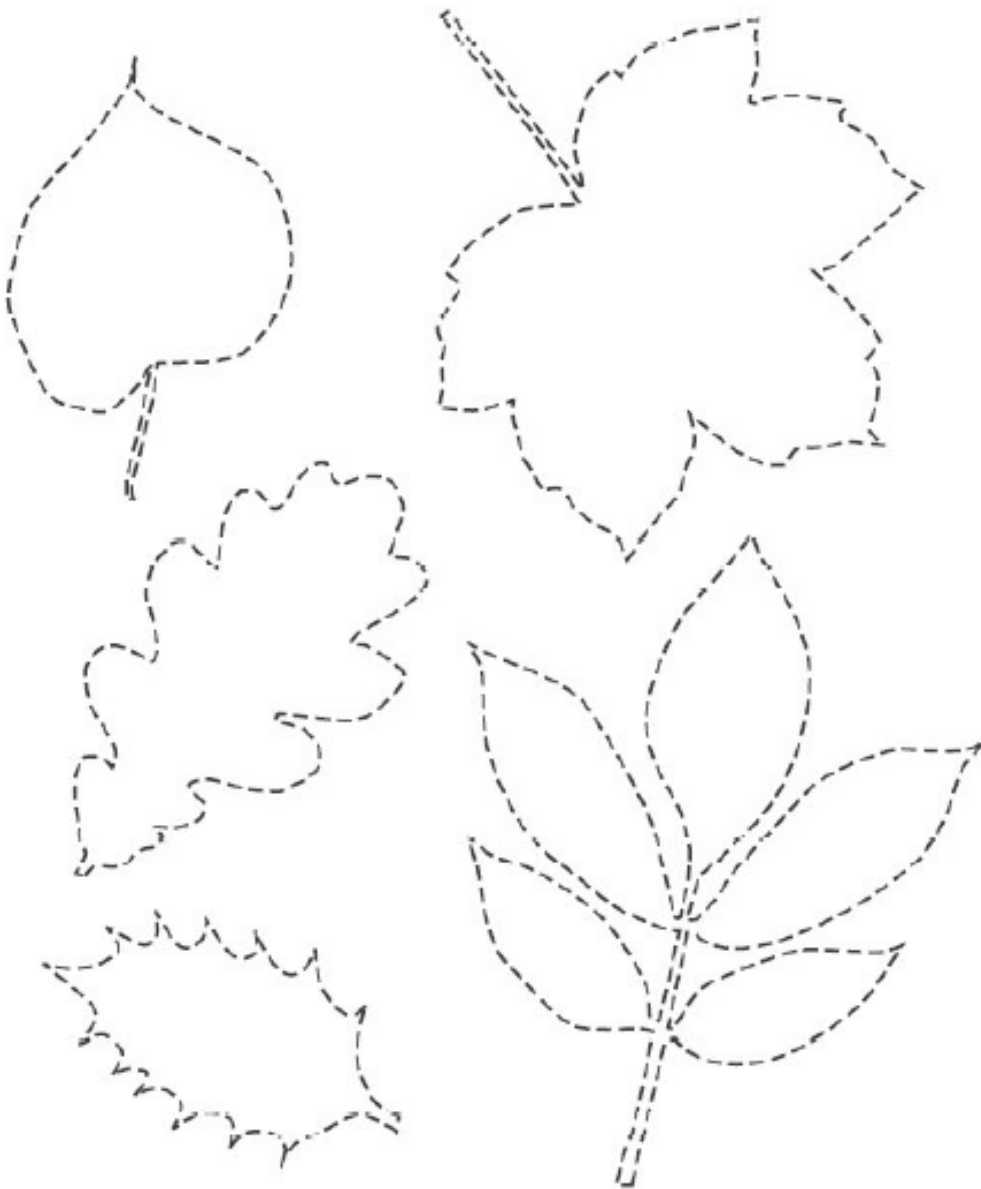
And then there was one last thing he had to do, using what was left in the main part of the rucksack, under the leaves.

He went from house to house of all the children he met on his way and magicked himself inside and left them jumpers, sweaters, anoraks, overcoats, scarves, boots, umbrellas and other autumn gear that he pulled out of the rucksack as if it was a clothes factory that never closed. "I couldn't forget that now could I?" he said out loud, proud and satisfied, once this was done. "How could the children get out to see the great show I have put on for them if they are not dressed for it?" And onward the autumn magician went, as every year, year after year after year, carrying wind, rain, cold, and some squirrels, and other surprises, in his well filled rucksack. And the multi-coloured leaves the rucksack scatters as he goes mark the autumn musician's tracks round the planet, where year in and year out he follows the summer magician, who follows the spring magician, who follows the winter magician, who follows the autumn magician

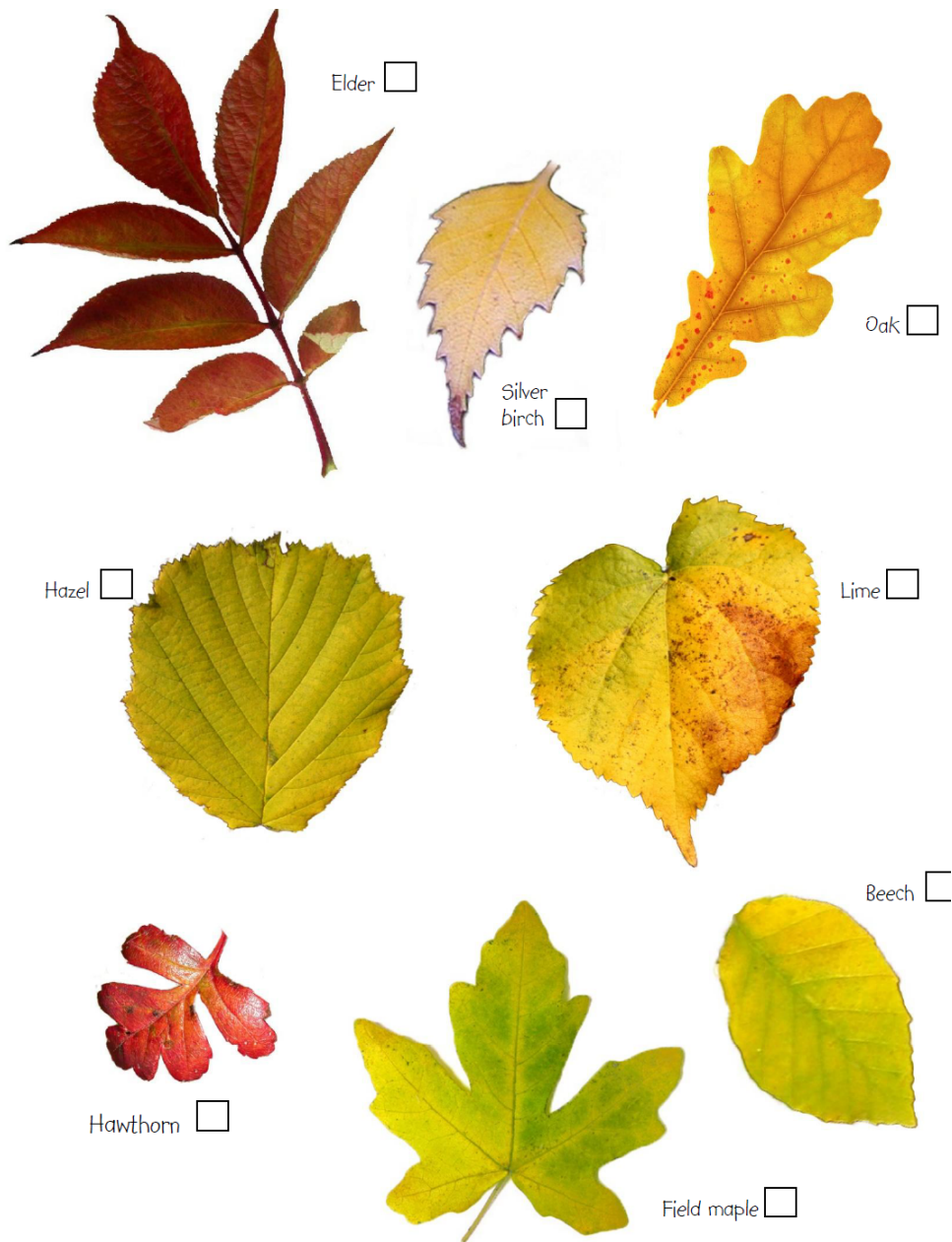


Autumn is a season of warm colours, yellows, reds, oranges, against backgrounds of browns and blacks.

Play with the colours and paint these leaves any colour you like!



Look for these leaves on the ground. Mark the ones you find in the boxes below. Keep the different ones separate. Note how the colours change from one leaf to another, even on leaves from the same tree, and how all the leaves are different on each side.



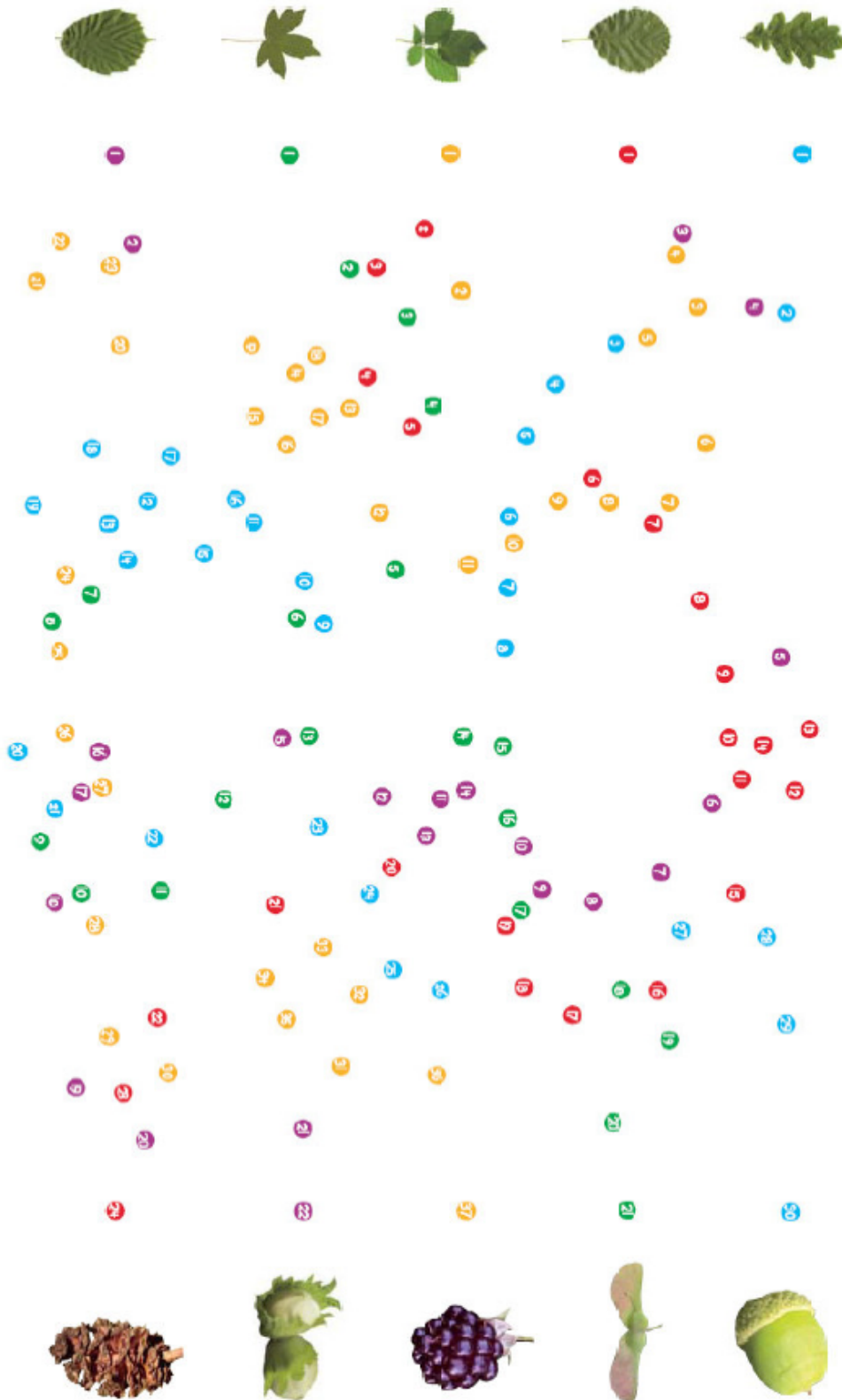
Now that we have found and gathered all those leaves, let's create something new with them ... lay them out in a line to make a snake, with head and body and tail, or lead them off into the woods, over fallen tree trunks, along banks, wherever you like ...

Look carefully at the different colours, shapes and textures of the leaves, and use them to make an autumn flower, to mark a footstep of the autumn magician. Don't forget to turn the leaves over when you are trying them out, to see how different their colours and textures are on either side.



Join the dots to match each leaf with its corresponding seed.

Can you identify the magical, mysterious thing the joined dots reveal?



Hunting for acorns:

During the autumn months squirrels, mice and other wild animals, including some birds, gather fruits and nuts to see them through the winter, that they know is coming, just as much as we do.

You'd imagine they would have to have pretty good memories to remember where they put their larders, wouldn't you?

Of course they do, and to appreciate just how much, try this little exercise yourself:

Find a handful of acorns in the wood, looking under sessile and holm oak trees, or spiny-coated sweet chestnuts, or dark mahogany horse chestnuts, or walnuts, or beechnuts, and then bury them under the leaves or in the soil. Now walk away, as far as you dare, a good distance anyway, and stand for a while, and look at other things.



Now go back and try to remember where you put the acorns or the nuts. It's not easy, sure it's not?

So think of the animal going back to find its larder months later, maybe with snow on the ground ...

And now bury your hoard again, have a good look at all the landmarks and take your bearings on them, for when you come back to the park next year. By then, with any luck, some of them may have germinated and sent out their first roots and leaves.

And that is how the clever trees use animals to spread and propagate themselves.



How many of these treasures left by the autumn magician have you found and collected?

- ☐ The sound of a walnut thudding onto the ground from a great height
- ☐ Two different kinds of seeds
- ☐ A leaf with lobulate, or wavy, edges, like the oak's
- ☐ A sweet, or edible, chestnut
- ☐ The noise an animal makes stepping through leaves or burrowing under them
- ☐ An acorn clasped in its little cup with the curly hook on the end
- ☐ A tooth-edged leaf, like the elm's
- ☐ A seed with wings, like the sycamore's
- ☐ Pine cones
- ☐ The sound of the wind blowing through the forest
- ☐ Ten leaves with different colours and shapes
- ☐ A leaf in the form of a star
- ☐ The sight of a squirrel going about its business among the trees





Mighty oaks from little acorns grow
Meaning great things may come from small beginnings

Give someone an acorn and hope they'll give you back an oak
Meaning to give someone a present or do something for them in the hope of getting something bigger and better back

