



Jacoby Creek Land Trust

PO Box 33 • Bayside, CA 95524

www.jclandtrust.org

(707) 822-0900 • jclandtrust@yahoo.com



Forming & Flinging Seed Balls

Grades: K-12 **Subjects:** Science, Environmental Studies

Group Size: 3+ **Duration:** 30-50 min.

Setting: Outside, in the fall

Key Words: native plant propagation, native species and wildlife habitat, ecology, and riparian restoration

Goals/Objectives: Students will understand the significance of native species and their importance to the particular riparian habitat in the Jacoby Creek watershed. They will mix soil and seeds of native flowers, form seed balls, and toss them around the Jacoby Creek riparian area.

Background: Forming and flinging seed balls is a fun activity and a great method for distributing the seeds of native plants and improving habitat for wildlife. Begin by encasing the seeds of native flowering plants in a mixture of clay and compost, and then simply scatter them over the ground. Since the seeds are already planted within the soil ball, they do not need to be buried. When sufficient rain has permeated the clay and the seeds inside sprout they are protected within the ball that contains nutrients and beneficial soil microbes. After forming the seed balls, the students can hike around the JC riparian area and scatter the seeds and/or take some home to spread.

Materials & Prep: In addition to the seed ball ingredients, you will need to prep a workspace to mix the seeds and a flat surface to leave them to dry. Depending on how many seed balls you want to make, collect the ingredients in the following proportions:

- 1 part compost or humus
- 2 parts native seed mixture
- 5 parts fine, dry, red clay (not grey or white)
- 1 part water



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Activity:

1. Show the students all of the ingredients for the seed balls/beads and discuss the importance of each.
2. Mix dry ingredients (seeds, compost, and clay) together to fully coat the seeds.
3. Add water a little at a time until the seed-soil mix is easily moldable into half-inch balls.
4. To form a half-inch ball, pinch off a piece of the seed-soil mix and roll it between your palms for a few seconds until the soil sets up into a secure ball. There is no right or wrong way to make seed balls – get creative!
5. Place your seed balls on a flat surface to dry. Once they are dry, they can be scattered or stored in a cool, dry place where they can breathe.
6. While you are forming or drying your seed balls, discuss that the seeds are planted within the soil and will not need to be buried or watered once scattered on the ground. The clay and humus mixture prevents the seeds from drying out in the sun, blowing away in the wind, and getting eaten by insects, rodents, birds and other animals. The seed balls will lie dormant until a sufficient amount of rain falls to start their germination. They should not be watered unless you are going to continue to water them until rainfall takes over.
7. Discuss the different native species chosen and their significance to the ecosystem and wildlife in the area. Native plants can be useful for seeding dry, thin and compacted soils, and for restoring native species, wildlife habitats, and riparian areas. Native flowers attract many beneficial insects, which pollinate flowers and provide a food source for salmon and trout in the creek and amphibians along the banks. Native plants make up a crucial part of the food web and play a vital role in the riparian ecosystem along a waterway. In this way, native plants can help to restore and rehabilitate ecosystems.
8. Once the seed balls are dry, the balls can be scattered at a density of about 10 seed balls per square meter or yard.