

## Sketching nature like Beatrix Potter



# DENBIGHSHIRE DIGITAL ADVENTURES

Download tomorrow's adventure

As well as being one of our best-loved children's authors and a skilled artist, Beatrix Potter was also a talented naturalist. She loved being out in the countryside, sketching flowers, trees, animals and especially fungi, which was all good practice for the illustrations that later made her books so popular.

This activity takes you close to one of the spots where Beatrix Potter found inspiration while visiting her uncle and aunt, and offers some simple tips to help get you sketching, too.

### Before you start



### How to get there

This activity takes place on a woodland walk on the outskirts of Denbigh.

The woodland is just off the B4501 road out of Denbigh towards Nantglyn. As you are heading out of Denbigh, after approximately a mile you'll come to a sign on the side of the road for Cae Dai – Denbigh's 1950s Museum. Find a safe place to park by the sign.

### Post code:

LL16 4SU  
(this is the Cae Dai museum itself).

### Public transport:

For public transport options, call Traveline Cymru on 0871 200 2233 or National Rail Enquiries on 08457 48 49 50.

### Activity starting point:

To start the activity, stand facing the Cae Dai sign, and then take the path to the left, past the stile and follow the woodland track down.

### How long will this activity take?

The walk should only take you 20mins to half an hour. However, you can take as long as you like to sketch, paint or draw what you find around the woodland.

### Let's get started

If you're new to nature sketching, then don't worry if things don't turn out perfectly first time. Just go with the flow and see where it leads you!

The seasons will obviously have a great influence on what you can sketch and in spring and summer the fields and hedgerows are full of wild flowers, from the wonderful white petals of stitchwort, to the yellow of celandine and the pink of red campion.

Drawing and painting flowers was a typical pastime for a young girl from the Victorian middle classes like Beatrix Potter. She soon developed a great talent for it, and developed a style that involved meticulously and accurately copying flowers.

Some of her most detailed paintings of flowers appear in *The Tale of Tom Kitten*, where the cats play in a cottage garden full of pansies, roses and snapdragons. Tall, slender foxgloves feature in *The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck*, while water lilies take centre stage in *The Tale of Mr. Jeremy Fisher*. (1)

You should be walking down the track by now, which leads you down hill through the woodland. (2) After a minute or so, you should come to a waymarker. At this point, turn right, and continue down the stepped path.

Flowers come in every imaginable shape, size and colour. But look closely and most can be sketched using just a few basic shapes – circles for flowers like daisies, a cylinder shape for the 'trumpet' of a foxglove or a conical or cup shape for a flower in bud, like a rose.

Some flowers will be single and round, like a dandelion or daisy, while others will be clustered along a stem, like rosebay willowherb. Look carefully at how the flower heads, petals, stem and leaves all fit together.

If you carry on walking through the wood, you'll come to a field; the river runs to the left, and there is a bridge and picnic table that you could set up your sketching materials on. (3)





### What you need

Pencil, paper and a rubber.

Good walking shoes – things can get muddy!

A camera or camera phone to take reference shots.

### Top tips:

Softer pencils – labelled 'B' – are great for the shadows, while harder pencils – labelled 'H' – are better for detail and subtle areas of tone.



### Useful information

Please be aware that this walk goes through woodlands, fields and by a river, so care should be taken at all times. The path at times can be quite steep, and there are a number of steps, so it may not be suitable for buggies or prams.

The woodland walk is part of a 2-3 hour trail that takes in Gwaenynog Hall, where Beatrix Potter stayed when she visited the area. The walk is detailed, with a map, in the *Rural Walks in Denbighshire* booklet, available from the information centre in Denbigh library or downloadable from [www.denbighshirecountryside.org.uk/rural-walks](http://www.denbighshirecountryside.org.uk/rural-walks)

If you decide to walk on to Gwaenynog Hall, please remember that it is a private residence. But the gardens are open to the public, by appointment only, from June through August.

### For more information:

Contact Gwaenynog Hall during the summer months on 0174 581 2066. Entrance is £3.

[www.denbighshire.gov.uk/countryside](http://www.denbighshire.gov.uk/countryside)

A round flower, like a daisy or buttercup, is great flower to start with. At the right time of year, you'll be likely to find these flowers in the field, amongst the grass. Draw a circle and then add a second smaller circle inside it.

It's a good idea to divide the bigger circle up with some light marks round the edge to give you an idea of how many petals to add in. You can rub the guides out later.

Draw in the petals with U-shaped lines starting from the middle and using light lines to give them a delicate feel.

Finally, you can add a slightly curved stem, which helps to make the flower look more natural, and a couple of leaves on either side.

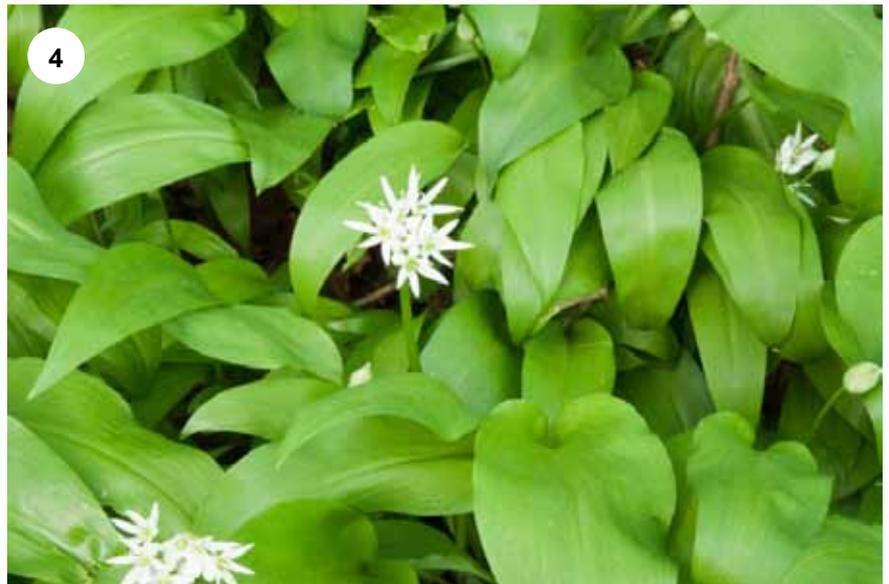
Leaves are something that you can draw at any time of the year. Like flowers, they come in all shapes and sizes, so have a good look at what you're going to draw first.

They are often symmetrical, with the right side nearly mirroring the left. Look carefully at the leaf's edge too – some are smooth while others are toothed and even spikey, like holly.

Now for the blade of the leaf. Is it shiny, smooth, bumpy or even hairy? How do the veins run across the surface? Do they branch off from a big central vein, or are they parallel with each other?

Look amongst the trees by the river for leaves to sketch – the smooth, curved leaves of the wild garlic that grows on the woodland floor would also make a great subject, or find different leaves that have fallen from the trees.

(4)





### Getting back to the start

You'll need to retrace your steps to get back to the car; back through the field and up through the woodlands. Take care, the walk back is up hill!



### What did you think?

Tell us what you thought about this activity, and share some of your sketches on the Discover Denbighshire Facebook page.

Look carefully at the stem. They're rarely completely straight and often have a slight curve as they grow upwards towards the light.

Once you've tried a few, look for a leaf with a bit of a twist to it; they're rarely flat and often kink and curl so that you can see the paler underside. Look at how the light is falling on the leaf. You can highlight these features by shading in certain areas.

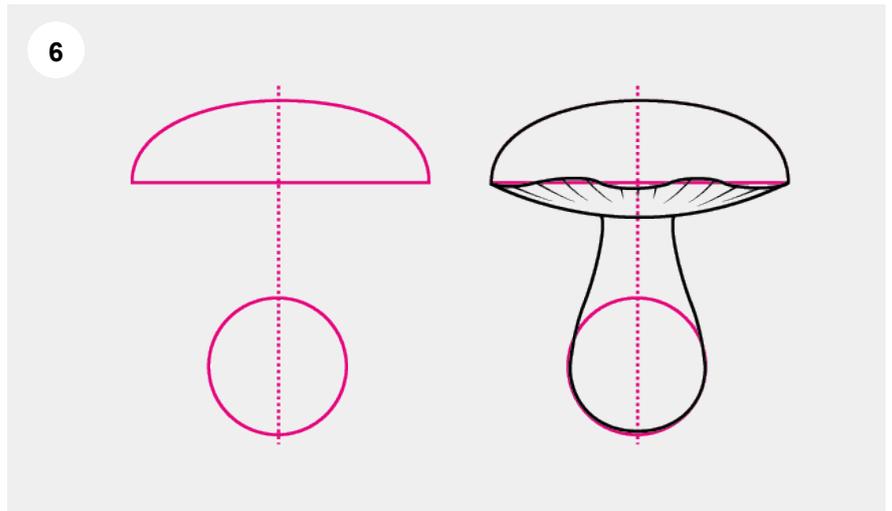
The trees around the field and the wooded area are a great place to spot another possible sketching subject – in autumn, look out for fungi pushing up through the ground, or sprouting out from trees trunks, branches and other deadwood.

Beatrix Potter excelled at drawing fungi and she was fascinated by their rich colours and intricate details and became something of an expert in mycology. (5)

Start by drawing the cap of the mushroom. It could be a pebble-shaped oval, or pointy, or a type of bracket fungus growing like a scallop shell from the side of a tree. Some caps may be smooth, while others have ridges and bumps.

Stems are often quite fat and stubby and, by tilting it slightly one way, you can help bring the picture to life.

Now, draw in the gills underneath the cap, by adding some vertical lines to give the mushroom texture. Keep on adding details by sketching in blemishes and creases on the stem, or perhaps a bird or a slug has nibbled off a piece of the cap? (6)



Winter is the season when the gnarled, twisted outline of trees silhouetted against a looming sky come into their own.

First, make sure your pencil's got a long sharp point. If you use a knife rather than a sharpener you can whittle a really long point and then use the tip for details and the side for drawing broad lines and shading.

Have a good look at your tree and decide whether you're going to pick out an individual one, or draw several together. (7)



Starting with the trunk, use bold lines for the outline and vary the width so that it's wider at the bottom and narrower at the top. Look at how the light is falling on the tree and add some shading to one side of the trunk by holding the pencil slightly to the side and using the edge of the lead.

Now for the branches, which usually start about three-quarters of the way up the trunk. You'll see that the lower branches are often longer and spread out flatter, while the higher ones are shorter and reach straight upwards. Vary the width of the branches too, and shade some of them so they match the trunk.

You can add some detail too, such as an old bird's nest or squirrel's dray high up in the tree, or, if you've drawn a few together, why not turn it into a rookery, with a swirl of simple black birds coming into roost.

If you're going to add some colour to your pictures once you get home, it's worth taking a photo of what you've drawn so you've got something to refer to later on.

Once you've sketched your way around the woodland river and field you'll be ready to head back to the car. You'll need to go back the way you came, taking care as you climb back up the hill through the woodland.

---

## Don't miss

Whilst you're in the area, there's lots of other great places that you could visit...

### Denbigh Castle walls

Pick up your own key to unlock the gate explore over half a mile of walls that still circle the town. Look out for the impressive Countess Tower and Goblin Tower!

Collect a key from Denbigh library on High Street. The staff in the library will direct you to the best starting point.

The Castle walls are managed by Cadw.

For more information, visit [www.cadw.wales.gov.uk](http://www.cadw.wales.gov.uk) or call 01745 813385.

### Denbigh Castle

'Dinbych' in Welsh means 'Little fortress', so don't miss the chance to explore the town's Castle. It was one of a chain of fortresses built across the heartlands of Wales by Edward I and its impressive triple-towered gatehouse, is still considered one of the great wonders of Wales.

The entrance to the Castle is on Castle Hill, LL16 3NB.

As with the Castle walls, the Castle itself is managed by Cadw.

For more information visit [www.cadw.wales.gov.uk](http://www.cadw.wales.gov.uk) or call 01745 813385.

### Bodelwyddan Castle

The castle is set in 260 acres of magnificent parkland and dates back to the mid 1800s.

As well as an historic house and museum, the castle retains strong links with the National Portrait Gallery, and has an impressive art collection of its own. The grounds include practice trenches used during the First World War and well as an adventure playground and garden maze.

Leave the A55 at junction 25 of the A55 and follow the brown and white signs.

For more information visit [www.bodelwyddan-castle.co.uk](http://www.bodelwyddan-castle.co.uk) or call 01745 584060.