

LEAF-CUTTER ANT RELAY RACE



Object of the game: To pretend to be leaf-cutter ants bringing back pieces of leaves to the colony.

SUGGESTION: Before doing this activity, watch some videos of leaf-cutter ants at work. There are a lot of videos available on YouTube, ranging from one-hour documentaries to short clips that are only a few minutes long.

Target age group: 4 to 10

Materials needed: brown grocery bags, scissors, marker, and large pieces of cardboard if you want to do that option (such as a washer or refrigerator box cut into four pieces)

How to set up:

1) Make large paper leaves. You can use paper from a large roll, but grocery bags can also be used if you open them up and flatten them out. If the wrinkles bother you, they can be ironed out. Cut out general leaf shapes and add some vein lines with a marker. (These leaves will be shredded during the game, so don't worry too much about artwork!)

2) You will need a large room or outdoor space. Mark a start line. Put some paper leaves (or the large pieces of cardboard) at the other end of the space.

How to play:

OPTION 1, using the paper leaves

Players form two teams. To complete the race, team members take turns crawling down to the leaf area, cutting a piece of leaf (about the size of their hand or a little larger) and coming back. They should carry the piece of leaf with their teeth, simulating how the ants carrying things with their mandibles. The first player must be all the way back before the second player leaves. The goal is to have each player take a significant chunk of the leaf each time. The last player will bring back whatever is remaining of the leaf. The first team to bring back their whole leaf wins that round.

NOTE: If you are playing in a space that is carpeted, beware of carpet burn. If the players are all wearing long pants, you don't have to worry. If players are wearing shorts or have bare feet, they can get abrasions without noticing. You can instruct players with bare knees to crawl in such a way that their knees don't touch the ground.

OPTION 2, using large cardboard leaves

Players will remain standing up for this version. They will be allowed to run down to the leaf pile instead of crawling. For an interesting twist, you could set up an obstacle course as an alternative to running. In the picture at the top of this page we see ants marching along a twig. You could use a piece of lumber lying on the floor to represent a twig, or a piece of rope to represent a vine. They often crawl along vines in the forest. You can even use cones or chairs to make twists and turns in the path so that they have to move carefully and slowly instead of an all-out run.

Players will carry the large pieces of cardboard upright, trying to look like the ants in this picture. They can balance the cardboard on one shoulder if they need to.