



# Nutting in May

“Nutting in May” is one of the most widely sung English folk song games played throughout the past centuries. It accompanies the May Day celebration. Some believe that the term “nuts in May” may actually be referring to “knots in May,” or “bunches of flowers” that were collected and given away.

Below, you will find an exact transcription of the original singer for this song game. It was collected by MacColl, D.S. in Lancashire, England, c 1907, and sung by Emily G. Kemp.

We come gath - 'ring nuts in May, nuts in May, nuts in May,

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We come gath - 'ring nuts in May, on a cold and frost - y morn - ing.

### **Transcription of song text:**

“Nuts in May” is one of the most widely sung English folks song games, played throughout the past centuries.

*“We come gath’ring nuts in May, nuts in May, nuts in May,  
We come gath’ring nuts in May, on a cold and frosty morning.”*

The players stand in rows opposite of one another; one side sings the above and the other side then sings:

*“Who will you have for nuts in May, nuts in May, nuts in May,  
Who will you have for nuts in May, on a cold and frosty morning.”*

To which the first side replies:

*“We’ll have (M. or N.) for nuts in May, nuts in May, nuts in May.  
We’ll have (M. or N.) for nuts in May, on a cold and frosty morning.”*

The one called moves forward and stands between the rows. Next follows the query:



*“Who will you send to fetch ‘her’ away, fetch her away, fetch her away, etc.”*

To which the answer:

*We’ll send \_\_\_\_\_ to fetch ‘her’ away, fetch her away, etc.”*

### ***Song Game Transcription:***

*An opposite is sent out to take his place opposite her. When all the couples, are placed, each couple joins hands, and tries which one is strongest.*

### **Suggestions for making this successful in the classroom:**

1. All students line up in two facing parallel lines (or two “teams” in parallel lines). Each team discusses which child on the other team they would like to have come to their “side.” The song is sung, and the first team requests a child to join them, i.e., “We’ll have ‘Mary’ for nuts in May.” The second team then chooses a child from the first side, and sings, “We’ll have ‘Peter’ to fetch her away.” Both selected children meet in the middle of the two lines, over a handkerchief placed long ways down the middle of the set. They grasp each other’s arms close to the elbow and attempt to pull each other over to the other side. Whomever gets pulled over first, joins the other team.
2. Instead of pulling each other, the two children in the middle could engage in a “Rock, Paper, Scissors” type game with the ‘winner’ taking the other child back to the ‘winner’s’ team.

### **Notes**

1. This variant of “Nutting in May” comes from: *The Lucy Broadwood Manuscript Collection found in Vaughn Williams Memorial Library, “The Full English Digital Archive,”* (<http://www.vwml.org/>) collected by MacColl, D.S., and performed by Emily G. Kemp in Lancashire, England, c. 1907. <http://www.vwml.org/search?qtext=nutting%20in%20may&ts=1460399363338&collectionfilter=HHA;SBG;LEB;JHB;GB;COL;CC;DCD;GG;AGG;PG;HAM;MK;FK;EM;L;MN;TFO;CJS1;CJS2;FSBW;RVW1;RVW2;AW>
2. Historical information for this song can be found in, *The Traditional Games of England, Scotland, and Ireland, Collected and Annotated by Alice Bertha Gomme, Vol. 1, 1894.*
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