Summer Explorers!
Welcome, Summer Explorers!

Do you like scavenger hunts and asking questions about what's going on in the natural world? The activities in this guide will give you some ideas on how to connect more with nature, and maybe even collect some scientific data along the way!

Enjoy Nature Responsibly

Explore only on posted trails - even small feet can trample fragile flowers and animals.

Carry out what you carry in - take only photographs and leave only footprints!

Respect wildlife and give them distance. If you think you see an animal in distress, call 1.877.457.5680 (on weekends) or 518.357.2355 (during the week).

Exploring with a dog? Keep your pup on a leash to avoid frightening humans or wildlife.

Be kind! Everyone deserves to have fun outside.
Before You Explore

Safety First

1. Don’t explore alone if you’re going far from home. Take a friend or adult, and let someone know where you’re going and when you expect to return.

2. Dress for success! The only bad hike is one where you’re not wearing the appropriate clothes. Check the weather before you head outside. Dress in layers, and wear long sleeves and pants to prevent ticks.

3. Bring snacks and water!

4. Be aware of your surroundings - stop, look, and listen. Be especially aware of poison ivy (pictured below), and always check for ticks.

5. Bring a phone to stay connected if you need to call for help.

6. Pack a first aid kit and know how to use it.
Keeping a Nature Journal

Throughout this guide there are blank pages for keeping a journal related to each of the activities. In addition to being a great way to remember all the cool things you’re seeing and doing this summer, nature journaling is a great way to build observation skills and write questions about what is going on around you to look up later.

No matter where you live or how near or far you travel, there is nature everywhere, sometimes you just need to be on the lookout for it!

Use the blank pages in this guide to draw, write, or even press flowers to help you remember what you did this summer!
Sample Nature Journal Page
Activity: Find your Sit Spot

What is a sit spot? A sit spot is a place outside that you will visit regularly, where you'll take time to observe your surroundings. A sit spot helps you hone your senses and quiet your mind. As you become more aware of nature, you become more connected to it.

A sit spot can be almost anywhere, and you can sit for any amount of time. Take this guide with you to write down on the journal page what you're hearing, seeing, smelling, and feeling! Visiting the same spot in nature on a regular basis will help you get to know the plants and animals we're sharing in this place we call home.

Materials Needed:
A pen or pencil, this guide. Your five senses: hearing, seeing, smelling, touching, and tasting (for tasting, just inhale deeply - don't eat things in nature!).

Sit Spot Instructions:
1. In your yard or neighborhood, find a spot that you can revisit throughout the summer.

2. Stop there for a few moments. Close your eyes. Listen, take a few deep breaths, and smell deeply. Open your eyes. How many birds can you see? What plants and flowers are you seeing? Do you see any animals? What are you seeing that’s different from the last time you were out?

3. Use all of your senses and observe the changes happening over time in the natural world. Take a few minutes to focus consciously on each of your five senses. If your eyes are closed, you may want to start with hearing or touch.
Activity: Sound Mapping

A great way to become more aware about what’s going on in nature is through sound mapping. This activity can be done anywhere outdoors.

Materials Needed:
A pen or pencil, a piece of paper.

Sound Mapping Instructions:
1. To start, make an “x” on the center of your paper. This “x” shows where you are sitting on your “map.”

2. When you hear a sound, make a mark on the map to represent the sound you heard.

3. Create a key on the side of your map. For instance, if you hear wind in a tree, you could create wavy lines. A bird singing could be a musical note! Or you could just write the words for each sound. Try to indicate on the map the distance and direction of the sound from where you are sitting, using the top of the page for sounds in front of you, and the bottom for sounds behind you.

4. Close your eyes to help focus your hearing while listening for sounds, or cup your hands around your ears to increase your ability to hear. Try to determine the sounds going on all around you.

5. Go out to the same spot at different times of day. What different sounds did you hear? Mark them on your map in a different color. What sounds were most familiar to you? Were there sounds you had never heard before? What was your favorite sound?
X
you are here
Activity: Window View Drawing
If the weather isn’t great for getting outside it might be a good opportunity to do some window view drawing!

Materials Needed:
A pen or pencil, colored pencils, crayons, or markers, two pieces of paper.

Window View Drawing Instructions:
1. Set up your drawing tools at your windowsill. Draw the frame of your window on the edges of the page.

2. Now draw what you’re seeing just within that frame of reference. Try to be as detailed as possible, include everything you see, trees, buildings, fences, sky, clouds, rain, sun, include birds if they fly over, squirrels….what else?!

3. Now get out another sheet of paper, draw your window frame on the edges of the page, and this time draw a view of a magical place that you wish you were seeing outside your window. Is it the jungle, the ocean, a farm, or a different planet all together?

4. The next time you’re outside, go look more closely at what you were seeing through your window, did you notice something new that you hadn’t noticed before? Did you miss something small that you couldn’t see from your window?

5. If it’s nice out, and there’s a place to sit outside, grab another piece of paper and pretend you’re a squirrel or a bird or a bug, and draw what they might see looking at your window!
Activity: Nature “Photography”
Let’s pretend you are a photographer on assignment!
No camera? No problem! Any of these activities can be done as a journaling project!

Materials Needed:
A pen or pencil, colored pencils, crayons, or markers, a piece of cardboard, this guide.

Nature Photography Instructions:
1. To help focus on what you’re looking at, take a piece of cardboard or construction paper and create a frame by cutting out the center. Then take some imaginary pictures as if you’re a photographer.

2. Bug’s eye view: Pick an insect that you’ve seen and pretend to shrink yourself to their size. Craft a story using your bug’s eye view pictures about the adventures of your new friend.

3. Meet your neighbors: have you ever really noticed how much life is going on all around you? Take some time and start looking around for all the creatures that you share your yard or neighborhood with, try and get photos of as many of them as you can.

4. Patterns and colors in nature: look for patterns or shapes like spirals, waves, cracks, spots, or stripes. Take pictures of only green or red or purple things. Whatever you choose! Look for man-made versions of the same patterns, and compare these with the natural patterns you photographed.
Activity: Let’s Go to the Birds!
Why not start a bird list of all the backyard or neighborhood birds you are seeing? Sometimes it’s tough to spot birds or identify them when they’re flitting and flying around, but with these activities, you can become a better birder in no time!

Materials Needed:
Art supplies for drawing birds, a bird guide, materials for making a bird feeder (optional).

Birding Instructions:
1. Think of birding like a scavenger hunt! Start a list of how many new birds you see every day, even if you can’t identify them all. Make observations of the following features – size, shape, color, patterns, songs, calls, behaviors and where you’re seeing them. All these observations can help you identify what bird it is if you don’t already know.

2. Feeding the birds can make them stick around longer so you can get a better look. Thread some fruit on a wire and hang outside where you can keep an eye on it. This feeder will provide a healthy snack. If you want something even easier, take your apple core or an orange peel and spread nut butter on it and sprinkle it with bird seed. Then place it somewhere you’ve seen birds already and watch as they tell all their friends!
Activity: Who’s Home?
What do animals need to live? Food, water, and shelter! These three things are what makes a place livable, and together, are called a habitat! Parks and natural areas often include different habitats, which means there are homes for a lot of different animals.

Materials Needed:
Art supplies for habitats, old magazines or calendars, scissors, glue, twigs and leaves for making an animal home.

Who’s Home? Instructions:
1. The next time you’re out on a walk see how many different animal homes you can spot! Be on the lookout for a tree with a hole in it, a bird nest, a big log, a hole in the ground, or water.

2. Create a sorting game to match animals with their habitats. Take old magazines and cut out different animal pictures, or draw the ones you saw on your walk. Then draw different habitats that you saw, some examples are forests, ponds, fields, wetlands. Then create a game to match your animals with their homes!

3. Try to build an animal home, like a bird nest, out of twigs and leaves that you find in your yard or out on a walk. How would a nest from a bird that lives in a field look different from one that lives in the forest?
Activity: Let’s Meet Some Trees!
Sometimes it is hard to tell different trees apart. The next time you are on a walk, or looking out your window, choose a tree to meet and get to know better!

Materials Needed:
Art supplies for making leaf rubbings, leaves or bark.

Meet a Tree Instructions:
1. Look at the tree from a short distance away, and draw its shape. Ask yourself: is it round, pointy, or cone-shaped?

2. Get closer, look at the leaves, and draw them. Ask yourself: are they needle-like or broad and flat? Do they have toothed edges or are they smooth? Are they lobed, like a hand? Do the branches have single leaves, or little leaflets along a single stalk?

3. Now let’s look at the bark. Is it smooth or rough? What color is it? Is it peeling off?

4. Get a new perspective! Get up close to a tree and feel the different textures of the leaves, the bark, and the branches. Hug a tree! Close your eyes and listen to the leaves rustle and the branches creak. Smell the air, the bark, and the leaves.

5. Do a leaf or bark rubbing on your journal page or a larger piece of paper with crayons or sidewalk chalk. You can either do this outside or collect a few leaves and small pieces of bark from the ground and do it at home later. Place the leaf between the pages and use the side of a crayon to create an image of what’s below!
Meet a Tree Journal Page
Activity: Leaf Scavenger Hunt

Materials Needed:
This guide!

Scavenger Hunt Instructions:
Go on a leaf scavenger hunt! Can you find these leaves out on your walk? Draw other leaves you find on your journal page!

- Buckeye
- Oak
- Birch
- Hickory
Activity: Alphabet Scavenger Hunt
There is so much going on around us and so many different types of scavenger hunts you can do, the possibilities are endless!

Materials Needed:
Pen or pencil, paper, clipboard (optional), this guide.

Scavenger Hunt Instructions:
Head out and look for where you see the letters in shapes of things in nature. For example, the branching of a tree’s limbs may look like a Y or V, while the petals of a flower may look like a D or O!

Draw a line through each letter below as you see it!
Alphabet Scavenger Hunt, Part 2.

This time, write or draw what you saw that started with that letter. Get creative! For example: if you see a zig zag pattern on a tree bark, that can count for your Z!

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Activity: City Scavenger Hunt
You might not think there’s much nature in the city, but maybe you just haven’t been paying attention!

Materials Needed:
Pen or pencil, this list!

Scavenger Hunt Instructions:
Using this list, or making up your own based on what you think you might see, head out for an adventure to see how much nature you can find in the city!

Draw a line through each of these you see!

3 different kinds of flowers
Moss
Grass growing through a sidewalk
Flowing water
A nest
5 different birds
A feather
Vines growing on a building
A seed
A butterfly
A squirrel
An ant
Tree roots
Something fluffy
A spiderweb
Activity: Fairy Houses & Gnome Homes

Fairies and gnomes are small creatures no more than a few inches tall. They live outdoors and could use some help building their homes!

Materials Needed:

Items for building fairy houses and gnome homes - acorn caps, twigs, grass - your imagination is your only limit! Art supplies for drawing your home.

Houses & Homes Instructions:

Where might a fairy or a gnome live? Look around your yard or in the woods—are there little hollows in the trees, crevices in rock walls, ledges and mushroom shelters where a fairy might make a home?

What might a fairy or a gnome have? Do they hang their tiny clothes out on the line to dry? Do they keep potted plants in acorn cap vessels on the ledge of their window?

Do fairies or gnomes keep a garden? Do they sleep inside birds’ nests left behind in the brush? Do they build tiny ladders to climb up to their tree dwelling? Make sure to only use items that have fallen and be careful not to disturb other living things when you create their homes.

Draw a picture of the home you created or would like to create on the following page.
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Visit clctrust.org to learn more about the Columbia Land Conservancy’s ten Public Conservation Areas, which are great places to explore this summer! They are open for free, dawn to dusk, every day.

We’d love to see you there.