

At-Home Activity

Backyard, Park or Neighbourhood Observation Fun

Fun for preschoolers and elementary students

Based upon content from *Get Growing! Activities for Food and Garden Learning* by J Mayer-Smith and L Peterat

This “from home” activity is flexible enough to be fun for children of all ages. Older kids can help the youngers. This activity can be repeated over multiple visits as natural spaces change with time especially in the spring and fall.

Before you go out: Get Ready!

Brainstorm about how the children define life.

Ask: What do living things need? (air, food, water, shelter/protection ...)

Name features of living things. (eat, breathe, reproduce, grow/change with time ...)

Record: Use a whiteboard or sheet of paper on the wall to write down the ideas. For the younger kids have images of these features/needs (draw them, cut them out from magazines, download and print them – older kids can help with this).

Compare: Compare the list to the characteristics of an animal, a plant, a rock, an ocean/river/lake, a glacier/ice pack.

Prompt/suggest: If the list doesn't include features or needs required by animals (including birds, insects, etc.) and plants then offer suggestions or prompts.

Compare and Contrast: Discuss the differences between animals and plants.

Key Concepts about Plants:

- Breathe in oxygen like animals and use sunlight during the day for energy (photosynthesis)
- Breathe in carbon dioxide at night and expel oxygen (part of the global oxygen cycle that enables all life except for a few types of bacteria that don't require oxygen to live)
- Use nutrients from soil and water as well as sunlight to grow
- Reproduce by seeds (sexual reproduction) and/or by cuttings (pieces from one plant can grow into other mature plants that are the same as the original plant – asexual reproduction)
- Can “sequester” carbon dioxide to reduce pollution (role of rain forests and the boreal forests)
- Many animals must eat plants to grow and reproduce

Key Concepts for Scientific Observation:

- Good scientists look at the same thing over and over to see if there are any changes
- Good scientists record what they see: write or draw or photograph or video; remember to record the date, time and place each time you make a visit – if possible record the temperature and weather conditions, phase of the moon, season of the year

- Good scientists are respectful – allow everyone the space to see/observe; use your eyes first treat plants/animals/natural places with respect
- Good scientists use their senses: look and listen, practice gentle touch, careful smelling and taste only when an adult says it's okay to do so

Go into the yard, garden, neighbourhood or other natural space: Be a scientist!

Encourage each child to choose their own space in the garden/park/natural place in your neighbourhood that they can visit and observe each time you visit.

Remember container/potted gardens and balconies/decks may be natural spaces too!

More Activities:

For younger children: draw a picture, take a photo, make a leaf rubbing (see below)

Leaf Rubbing: white paper and crayons

- Position the leaf, underside up, under one layer of paper – the leaf should be visible through the paper
- Trace the outline of the leaf with a crayon, then rub the broad side of the crayon across the leaf within the outline of the leaf – you should see the leaf veining in the rubbing
- Look for different leaf shapes, patterns and sizes

For older children: write descriptive paragraphs or poems (see below); draw a map of the observation space and update it with each visit

Poems Types: acrostic, haiku, concrete, diamante

- Children can research different types of poems and use their favourite format to create a poem based on their observations and research – don't forget to illustrate them!

Share: Post Leaf Rubbings and/or Poems in your home or, with a parent's permission, on social media or share with other family and friends via email.