EXPLORE NATURE WITH ALL YOUR SENSES

Parents’ guide to exploring nature with children
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Nature is closer to you than you may think. A nature exploration adventure can start at your doorstep. All you need is a bit of curiosity, a spark of creativity and your five senses. So, open your ears, close your eyes, sniff around, taste some berries and the leaves you recognize, feel with your fingers and feet! Sharpen your senses in order to connect with nature. Our senses are the windows to an amazing world that we too often take for granted!

We need to remember that one's relationship to nature is formed in early childhood and one of the most important things we need to nurture in our children is the connection to nature and the curiosity to explore it. This is the way they learn, develop empathy for other living beings, develop the sense of care and understand the relation between humans and nature.

We invite you to spend time in nature with your children in a playful way and in this booklet you'll find some activities that will awaken your senses and turn nature into an amazing playground.
Sounds of Nature ~ sense of hearing

Sound map  ♂♂ 6+  ⏰ 20 min

The human beings are visual creatures. Our eyes are the most important tools to orientate ourselves in our surroundings. All other senses come after our sense of sight. This game will consequently open your ears and mind to the world of sounds that we usually don’t even notice consciously.

Everybody chooses a spot to sit. Keep several meters distance from each other. Close your eyes and focus on the sounds for a while. What do you hear? Where is the sound coming from? How loud is it? If you want to compare the sounds you have registered with others, you can draw a sound map. All you need is a blank A4 paper and a pen. Make a cross in the middle: this is your position. Stay on your spot for 5-10 or more minutes and note all the sounds and noises you can hear on your paper. You may either write (“bird singing”) or make a drawing or a symbol for each sound. ⬃ Can you draw a “real” map where all the sounds you hear are placed in the right direction and distance from you? What do you hear close behind you? What do you hear far in front of you? Just like a visual hiking or a street map you create, make a sound map – it’s fun to compare and talk about your findings once you come together again.

The only rule during the sound mapping: It is forbidden to talk!
Stalking like a wild cat  

Who wants to be the alert bird in the nest? One person sits in the middle of an open terrain, blindfolded, only relying to hearing. Use a scarf or any other type of clothes to cover one’s eyes – or the person can simply close their eyes (but don´t cheat!).

Everyone else is standing or sitting in a big circle, distanced a few meters from the bird in its nest. One person after another tries to stalk silently towards the bird. This can be tricky on a rocky ground, but easy on grass. In any case, you can play this game wherever and whenever. The bird has to detect the wild cats and point into their direction if it hears the sneaking sounds. In the case the bird is right the wild cat has to go back in the circle. If the bird points in the wrong direction the wild cat can continue sneaking. Once the wild cat reaches the nest, it becomes the bird in the nest and the game continues. If you want to choose a high difficulty level, try to play barefoot!

Collecting sounds  

It is the most fun to play this competitive game in two groups, in the mixed teams of adults and kids. Each group “collects” sounds, for an agreed time on a defined spot in nature, with their smartphones.

This is done by recording the sounds that items from nature or organisms produce, e.g. two stones or two wooden sticks clinking together, the whistling of the blade of grass, the sound of the wind in high grass, the chirping of grasshoppers etc. After the agreed time of “collecting” sounds, both groups play sound by sound to each other and have to guess or even find the item/organism that produces the sound. Which team finds more sounds?
See with your fingers  
4+  
30 min

Have you ever explored your surroundings just with your hands? Babies do that, but by growing up we rely more and more on our sight. It’s fun to “see” the nature around you only with your fingers though!

First, everybody walks around and looks for things that might be interesting / special / surprising once you have them in your hand or feel them. Concentrate on small things that you can remove without harming nature. Bring 3 to 5 of the items back and keep them hidden (e.g. under a shirt or in a cotton bag), no one should see them. One person closes their eyes and touches one or two “treasures” that the others brought. Can you guess what’s in your hands? An interesting variation can be not just to tell what you’ve touched, but to find and bring the same items. Take turns! In the end, the hidden items are uncovered and it’s revealed who did the right guess.

Find your tree  
6+  
20 min

This game is played in a wooded area in pairs. One person is blindfolded and then spun around in order to lose orientation. Afterwards, the other person leads carefully the blindfolded partner to a tree distanced around 10-30 meters, avoiding obstacles in the way, such as steep slopes or holes in the ground. The blindfolded ones now get familiar with “their” tree by touching its bark, surface, branches, roots etc., so that they may find it again later. After touching and exploring the tree for a while, the blindfolded person is again carefully led to the starting point. The pairs take turns. After returning again to the starting point both partners try to find their tree without any help. Do you recognize your tree? Do you need the help of your hands to be sure that it is “yours”?
Smells of Nature ~ sense of smell

Nose memory 🧑‍🤝‍🧑 6+ ⏰ 20 min

Each player, or each team, explores the surroundings and collects 3 to 5 items from nature with a peculiar smell. If you have a small container or bag use it to store the collected items. If not, just collect them and hide them from other players because they should not see them.

Now, let’s check who’s got the best nose. One player, or one team, smells one of the collected items and then, just by using their sense of smell, they have to find them in the surrounding area and bring them back to compare them. Was it a match? Beware of toxic substances and wash your hands afterwards or clean them with wet wipes.

Your personal hit list 🧑‍🤝‍🧑 5+ ⏰ 20 min

There are good and bad smells. This is very individual. Within a given time of, for instance 5 minutes, everybody tries to find their personal best and worst smell in nature. Do not collect the materials, just memorise where you have found them. After everybody is back, go together in pairs and lead one another to “their” olfactory highlights, the good and bad smells in nature.
All colours of Nature ~ sense of sight

Colour hunt  3+  30 min

What colour is the nature? The majority of children, but also adults, will say green. But is it?

The colour hunt can be carried out at a specific place or during a walk, especially if you have to return the same way back. Your task is to find a given colour in the nature. You can use coloured objects from nature or you can say out loud the colour, but you can also prepare a bag with various coloured papers or small objects, from which everyone draws one colour. Start the search. After the search, display the objects and discuss which colour was easy to find and what your favourite colours are. Using questions, direct the children to reach their own conclusions that nature is colourful and that its colours change throughout the year. After the activity, you may ask them again what colour nature is.
Autumn garland 🍁 4+ 🔨 30 min

Collecting as many colours as possible is a nice and entertaining task on a walk in autumn. Yellow, brown, orange, red, even violet – or still green: different plants appear in different colours. But then, what to do with all these collected leaves? To make a long autumn garland outdoors is a wonderful way to be creative and to have something to take home.

After everybody has explored the nature, caught flying leaves in the air or discovered some still on the trees and in the bushes, the collection of autumn colours (and of course shapes) is a feast for the eyes. One person starts to “sew” the leaves together or string them like beads with the help of a long needle. It is upon you how you will do this, it’s just important that the garland is solid enough to be transported home. It will be a colourful decoration of the entrance door, around a mirror, a frame or hanging in front of the window.

All you need is a long thick needle and a thread. If you didn’t take it on your trip you can do the garland later at home.
# Scavenger hunt

You can do this activity alone, in pairs or as a whole group. Can you find all the items listed up? Looking for special things will sharpen everyone’s eyes and help focus on the small details that slip our attention when just hiking. Choose between searching for all the items on the list or finding just as many as possible in a given time.

Having searching lists like our three ones might be handy when a hike gets long, boring or tiring or when the weather is not favourable and the mood of the group sinks. Tired kids get active and run again, wanting to complete the task along the hiking path. Make sure that everybody gets their chance to present all the findings and share their experience once they have finished searching.

## CAN YOU FIND...
- something soft  
- something stingy  
- something round  
- something hairy  
  (don’t bring animals)  
- something beautiful  
  (don’t pick flowers)  
- something red  
- something for making music

## LOOK FOR...
- three different seeds  
- a nibbled leaf  
- a feather  
- a bone  
- an egg of an insect  
- a trace of an animal  
- mud

## GO AND BRING...
- something that is as long as your little finger  
- something that is as heavy as an apple  
- something that is the same colour as your eyes  
- something that you can put your arms around and feels good  
- something that makes you 20 cm higher when stepping on it  
- something that is as tall as you  
- something that is as old as you!
In the spring, nature is full of various ingredients. The best soup that you can make from them is the nettle soup. No wonder that so many animals, like caterpillars, like it. We love it, too!

Stinging nettles grow near rivers, alongside paths, but also in the gardens. Once boiled, they don’t sting anymore, don’t worry. But it is good to have handkerchiefs or garden gloves when picking them. Or are there brave hearts among you that can pick them with your bare hands? In any case: take the shoot tips, so use the topmost 20 centimetres with the stem and the youngest leaves.

**INGREDIENTS:**

- ¾ l of vegetable broth
- 4 double handfuls of stinging nettle (app. 20 cm long shoot tips)
- 3/8 l milk
- 2 spoons of butter
- 2 spoons of flour
- 1 small onion
- 1 egg yolk
- salt, pepper
- sour cream (as much as you like)

Wash the nettle leaves and put them in hot soup. Boil for ten minutes, then strain them but keep the broth. Blend or chop the nettle leaves. Cut the onion, braise it lightly on butter and add the flour. When it gets brownish add cold milk. Steer to avoid clumps to form. Add the broth and cook all the ingredients for another 15 minutes. In the end, add the nettle leaves and bring again to the boil. Taste and add salt and pepper. Remove the soup from the stove. Blend the egg yolk with a bit of milk and add it to the soup to thicken it. Don’t boil anymore and serve it hot. A blob of sour cream makes the nettle soup just perfect.
Summer: Wild blueberry pancakes

When summer comes many berries get ripe. In the mountains, now is the time to pick the blueberries. Don’t eat them all out there, take some home to finish the day with a wonderful desert.

Blueberries grow in mountain regions on sour soil, under the trees in higher altitudes, and also outside of forests. Their blue roundish small berries are ready for harvesting in summer, depending on the elevation and the year.

INGREDIENTS:

- 250 g blueberries (picked in nature)
- 250 g flour
- 125 ml milk
- 1 egg
- 2 spoons of sugar
- a pinch of salt
- 3 spoons of butter
- 100 g of powdered sugar

Mix the flour, milk, egg, sugar and salt into a creamy paste. Add the blueberries and steer gently. Form small dumplings with a spoon and flatten them before you put them in hot butter in the frying pan. Fry on both sides until they become light brown and then take them out. Put powdered sugar on them and serve them hot.
Autumn: Roasted beechnuts

The forest nourishes its inhabitants. In the autumn you can see acorns, hazelnuts and also beechnuts on the ground. Acorns are bitter, but the beechnut tastes very well. September and October are the best months to collect them. Did you know that people from the stone age loved them? They were a healthy snack in their diet.

INGREDIENTS:
One handful of beechnuts
A bit of oil

First, take out the small, triangular nuts from their hairy-stingy shells. This is the ideal task for small children’s hands and can be done outdoors in the woods. Then, at home, peel the triangular nuts. This might take some time. The small nuts can be eaten raw, but they are even more delicious when fried. Put some oil in a frying pan and fry the peeled beechnuts for a few minutes. They are delicious in pumpkin soups, salads or pasta. You can even use them for pesto instead of pine nuts.
Art of Nature ~ sense of beauty

Silhouettes in nature

A child or an adult lies on the ground. The others put the items from nature around his or her body, for example, autumn leaves, acorns, pine cones, stones, fallen branches or bark pieces. After this is done, the person on the ground stands up and the body outline remains on the ground. It’s a real piece of art that can take any shape you wish. The wind and weather conditions will completely erase the trace in a few days.

Exhibition for the tiny creatures

Ants, bugs, centipedes, spiders, snails and slugs walk around all day long minding their own business. It would be nice if they had some work of art to look at along their paths. Carefully, clean up a small part of the ground (the size of your palm) along their paths, and make a little piece of art for them to admire. Use only the loose materials you can find on the ground.
PROTECTED AREAS FOR NATURE AND PEOPLE