



Friends of NCTC Program Activity  
*c. 2022 Friends of National Conservation Training Center*

**Summer Fun!**  
(ages 5 and older)

**Background**

It's summer! Now is the perfect time to get outside and enjoy nature. All of these activities are focused on exploring the natural world and recording your memories. Two words that you might want to know are "shinrin-yoku" (a Japanese term for "forest bathing") and "petrichor" (the smell of rain). Forest bathing is a relatively new idea that emphasizes spending quiet time in the forest rather than just walking quickly along a trail.

**What You Will Need for This Project** (all optional except friends!)

Fishing poles, bait, fishing gear  
Bicycle  
Rain jacket and boots  
Kayak  
Friends!

**What to Do**  
**Take a Hike...**

It's summer and there is no better time to get outside and explore nature! Perhaps you can visit a state or national park, wildlife refuge, or local park where there are trails. In some areas, there are Wilderness Areas! Even if you live in a city, there are parks where you can walk in the trees and flowers. Many people walk on nature trails as fast as they can, but it's more fun to experience "shinrin-yoku!" That's a Japanese term that means to take plenty of time in nature and using all five senses as you walk. That way, you will really experience being in nature. Be on the lookout for different plants and trees. If you don't know what they are, you can download a free App like SEEK (part of iNaturalist) on your phone and use it to help you identify different plants and flowers.

**...Then**  
**Design an Imaginary Flower**

Did you think about how flowers are different while you were out on a nature walk? Their appearance helps them in different ways, from following the sun (sunflowers) to attracting pollinators (many different ones) to needing a very shady place to live. Why not design an imaginary one!? Think about things like... Where would this flower live? What will it look like? Does it need shade or sun? What kind of pollinator does it attract? Why is your flower perfect for a pollinator? Does your flower have a special name? Once you have created this imaginary flower, go outside, take a walk, and compare your design with real flowers that will attract real pollinators!

**Go Fishing**

In your state, there are many places to go fishing. All you need is a fishing pole, some bait, and a place to go. Find out if there is a river or a stream near you and what kind of fish live there in fresh water. If you live near the ocean, there are different kinds of fish that live in salt water. If you don't have the fishing gear, ask a friend or a family member if you can borrow theirs or go along when they go fishing. If all else fails, some places (like parks or near the ocean) may rent you gear for a day. You will need to find out what kind of fish live where you are going and the type of bait that will attract them. Make sure you get a fishing license if your state requires one, but it will probably depend on your age.

### **Go For a Bike Ride**

Many places have areas with trails where you can go bike riding to explore nature (like the C&O Canal in Maryland, West Virginia, Virginia, and Washington, D.C.) There may be bike trails where you live, too! All you need is a bike, water, lunch, and a friend to go with you! Some places, like parks or urban areas, rent bicycles. Make sure you check the weather first, drink the water you take with you, and plan your bike ride with a map. Let someone know where you are going and when you plan to be back. Once you are on your way, look for things in nature that are interesting, stop, and take a closer look.

### **Go Kayaking**

If you live near a river or a large lake, you may have the opportunity to go kayaking. Many outdoor outfitters will rent kayaks for a day. Make sure that you go with an experienced kayaker and wear a PFD!

### **Go To The Beach**

Not everyone lives close to the ocean, but you might be taking a vacation to the shore. It's fun to play in the water, but if you take a walk along the shore, you can find all kinds of different things. Be on the lookout for crabs or birds. The size of the waves are a clue to how shallow the water is or whether it is low or high tide. Watch the birds flying above you—they are not all “seagulls,” but different species. Is the shoreline sandy or rocky? Don't forget to take along a field guide to coastal areas so you can identify shells that wash up on the sand, birds that run in the surf or fly overhead, and plants like sea oats.

### **Go To The Mountains**

Do you live near the mountains or planning a trip there soon? Higher elevations can be cooler in the hot summer months and many people like to explore mountain trails especially because of this. Every state has a “highest point” and it can be fun to visit that (even if it is only a few feet above sea level!) Before heading out for a hike make sure you check the weather, take water and a snack with you, and plan your day with a map. Let someone know where you are going and when you plan to be back. Once you are on your way, look for things in nature that are interesting, stop, and take a closer look. Views from the top of hills and ridges can be wonderful—maybe they will inspire you to become a park ranger or walk a long trail one day.

### **Dance In The Rain**

Sometimes people think they have to stay inside when it rains, but exploring nature in the rain (or just after it stops) can be a real adventure. Put on a raincoat, boots if you like, and get outside. There will be puddles to walk through, places where the ground is pure mud to splash through, and trees that you can hide under. Just before or after it rains, the air sometimes smells different. That's called **petrichor** and is caused by the water and compounds like ozone, bacteria and plant oils. Make sure you take a deep sniff during your rainwalk.

Just remember, there's a difference between a gentle rain and a thunderstorm, so please don't go outside when there is thunder and lightning! (Ben Franklin was just dumb—and lucky—with his kite experiment!)

### **Just For Fun With Your Friends! Egg, Caterpillar, Butterfly Game**

(This game works best with several players—the more the better!)

Bees aren't the only pollinators. Butterflies and moths move pollen from flower to flower, too. Unlike bees, butterflies and moths have the same 4-part life cycle: egg, caterpillar, chrysalis (cocoon), adult. This game uses “rock, paper, scissors” (RPS) as the basis. Remember: paper wraps rock, rock breaks scissors, scissors cut paper. Every player starts as an egg (crouched down). Two “eggs” play RPS. The winner becomes a caterpillar (crawling) and begins looking for another butterfly to play RPS. The loser stays an egg and looks for another egg. After caterpillar is chrysalis (stand up), and finally Butterfly (arms extended, flying.)

**Helpful Hints for Adults**  
**(books to read, other websites, links)**

*Finding Wild* by Megan Wagner Lloyd (ages 3-7)

*The Outdoor Scientist* by Temple Grandin (ages 8-12)

*A Girl's Guide to The Wild: Be an Adventure-Seeking Outdoor Explorer* by Ruby McConnell

*A Walk in the Woods: Into the Field Guide* by Emily Lober-Warren (may be hard to find)

*Backpack Explorer: Beach Walk* by Editors of Storey Publishing (ages 3-7)

*Backpack Explorer: On The Nature Trail* by Editors of Storey Publishing (ages 3-7)

*Backpack Explorer: Discovering Trees* by Editors of Storey Publishing (ages 3-7)

Find a National Park [www.nps.gov/findapark/index.htm](http://www.nps.gov/findapark/index.htm)

Find a National Wildlife Refuge [www.fws.gov/visit-us/refuges](http://www.fws.gov/visit-us/refuges)