

Nature Scavenger Hunt

<http://www.hometrainingtools.com/article.asp?ai=1341&bhcd2=1251228595>

Who doesn't love a scavenger hunt? Get your kids outdoors this summer and "scavenging" for treasures in nature. Armed with a list of items to find, they'll eagerly look at the world around them with more observant eyes. Nature watching will be exciting as they collect specimens, take pictures of animals, and do fun activities. This is a great afternoon project for a group of kids, or it can be expanded into a summer-long family project with siblings and parents working together to create fun displays with the results of their summer's explorations.



Planning a Scavenger Hunt

Your scavenger hunt can be as simple or as elaborate as you wish to make it. As you plan, consider carefully your location, the participants, and how long the hunt should last.

1. *Location.* Choose items for the scavenger list that the kids will most likely be able to find. If they are hunting in a local park, for example, don't ask them to find leaves from trees that don't grow there. For a summer-long hunt, your kids will look in many different locations, and it isn't necessary to plan these out ahead of time. If you are going out of town on a family vacation, though, you could do a little internet research to find out what kinds of trees and flowers are common in the area you are traveling to. It's a good idea to lay some ground rules first, as some places (such as certain national parks) don't allow you to pick any wildflowers, etc.

2. *Participants.* Design your scavenger list with the ages of the participants in mind. Younger kids may get frustrated if the items on their list are too hard to find, while older kids will enjoy the challenge. If you are working with a large group, form teams and let younger kids work with older kids. Decide whether your hunt will be a contest or not—some kids enjoy competition more than others. If your group is well-suited to it, have a prize for the person who checks the most things off the scavenger list. (Here are some **inexpensive science gift ideas**.)

3. *Duration.* Have a manageable list for the amount of time you have to work with. If you only have an hour or two, just make a list of things each participant needs to look for. For a longer-term project, include things to collect, activities to do, and things to photograph.

Scavenger Hunt Ideas

The possibilities for a nature scavenger hunt are endless! The following are some ideas to get you started designing your own scavenger list:

Things to See

- Pinecones, dandelions, seeds.
- Insects, such as a butterfly, dragonfly, grasshopper, and beetle.
- A spider web.
- Leaves from an oak or maple tree.
- Frogs, toads, and lizards.
- Wildflowers.
- Mushrooms.

- Wild berries (do not eat them unless they've been identified as non-poisonous!)
- If you're by the ocean, look for seashells and seaweed.

Things to Collect

- Find feathers or abandoned birds' nests. (Put them in plastic bags and have some hand sanitizer ready to wash off the germs after you touch them!)
- Encourage identification skills by having the kids find different types of leaves or flowers native to your area. (Look for regional field guides in your local library or on enature.com, or do an internet search for the "native plants" of your state.)
- Collect ferns, moss, pinecones, seeds, thorns, and other botanical specimens.
- Catch butterflies, find a cocoon or chrysalis, capture a ladybug, dragonfly, or other insects.
- Look for fossils, colored rocks, quartz, or flat skipping stones.
- Find a "pet," such as a frog, snail, or grasshopper.
- Look carefully for something "camouflaged," such as a walking stick insect or a moth that blends in with its surroundings.
- If you live on the coast, include things like seashells, seaweed, small crustaceans, and small pieces of driftwood.

Things to Do

- Go wading, swim in a lake, climb a tree, go on a picnic.
- Draw a flower, make a dandelion chain, make a leaf rubbing.
- Get up early to watch the sun rise, write a description of a sunset.
- Go hiking, build a shelter, find your way with a compass.
- Look at pond water under a microscope, go stargazing with binoculars or a telescope.
- Record a birdsong or other animal sounds.
- Find a chrysalis and watch a butterfly emerge from it.
- Go to the zoo and have each child find a fact about their favorite animal.
- Keep a nature journal for writing descriptions of activities and drawing pictures.

Things to Photograph

- Birds at a bird bath, birdfeeder, or bird house.
- Squirrels or other small animals.
- Animal tracks (if you have time, you can also make a **plaster cast**).
- Sunset or sunrise.
- Waterfall, mountain, boulder, lake, beach, or swamp (with someone in the picture!)
- A sibling or friend doing one of the activities listed under "things to do."
- Unusual sights like a tree root curled around a rock.
- The discovery (plant, animal, landscape) that amazed you the most.

Make a Display

Encourage kids to keep a **nature notebook** with a record of everything they saw on their nature explorations. Their notebook can include pressed flowers and leaves, pictures they took with a disposable camera, written descriptions, drawings, and more. Let them display three-dimensional objects in a **display case** or keep them in their own decorated cardboard nature box. Items such as seashells and rocks can make an attractive decoration in a glass jar. Insects can be pinned and labeled to be kept either on a piece of corrugated cardboard, or in a more permanent and attractive exhibit case. After hunting all summer, they should have quite a satisfactory collection!

Nature Tools

Before setting out on a nature expedition, gather a few important tools from around the house:

- Plastic bags - bring home specimens without making a mess.
- Camera - take pictures of what can't be collected with a digital or disposable camera.
- Notebook and pens or colored pencils - make notes and drawings so you can remember what you see.
- Jars - transport insects and other small critters, or use to display rocks and shells
- Snack - hunting can work up an appetite!
- Sunscreen and bug repellent - don't get burned and bitten.
- Baby wipes or hand sanitizer - clean up when you get grimy.

Kids don't need lots of fancy equipment to observe nature, but here is a list of suggested tools to make their study even more rewarding:

- **Insect net** - catch butterflies and other flying insects.
- **Binoculars** - observe birds and squirrels up close.
- **Magnifying glass** - see the intricate details on insects, flowers, leaves, and more.
- **Plant press** - preserve flowers and leaves to mount in a notebook or use for cards or crafts.
- **Field guides** - get help identifying trees, flowers, rocks, birds, etc.
- **Backpack** - carry all your exploration tools conveniently. (If you'd like a backpack already stocked with high-quality nature exploration tools that will last for years, see our line of **nature backpack kits**.)