

Nature JOURNALS

Tips To Get You Started

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Nature is replete with beautiful vistas, vibrant colours, poetic moments, discoveries in the very small and very large, hidden treasures, and always—always—the unexpected. Learning to keep a nature journal is a skill that will help you and your children retain memories and impressions for decades to come.

A nature journal is simply a place for capturing your words and sketches; it's a spot to record your observations, feelings, and thoughts about an aspect of the natural world that has caught your attention. A journal might include questions, philosophical rambles, personal reflections on what you are observing, favourite quotes or lines of poetry, and any other perceptions you may have. Drawing something in nature helps you to focus your observations and, in the process, see a lot more detail than you normally would. Even years later, clear memories of a species of plant, animal, or particular event in nature will come flooding back as you leaf through the pages of your journal. You might wish to make detailed field notes on your observations, or simply scatter a few point-form notes around a drawing. Rather than drawing as though you were an artist, simply think of yourself as a scribe or reporter, recording what you see. You might want to think of a nature journal as a treasure hunt, a way to collect and remember beautiful experiences. And if you can't easily get outdoors, just note what's happening right outside your window, as the seasons unfold.



Nature Journaling Tips

Materials: a small, hard-covered sketchbook with unlined paper; a 2B pencil (softer graphite for plants and birds, although any pen or pencil will do); good quality coloured pencils and/or watercolour pencils; a small pocket knife to sharpen them; and an eraser

What to Record: include the date, time (clock time or "early afternoon" etc.), location, weather, approximate temperature, and any other environmental conditions of note (e.g., birds singing, the smell of Balsam, Poplar in the air, etc.); take no more than a few minutes per drawing; make short notes about what you've drawn. Indicate the species' name if you know what it is

What to draw: ground observations such as things you can draw life size (e.g., a leaf); eye-level observations (e.g., entire plants); overhead observations (e.g., an entire tree, a soaring bird, clouds); whole landscape observations (be sure to label the main elements)

Where to draw: your backyard, gardens, bird feeders, a wetland or any body of water, a meadow or roadside, a hedgerow, or a beautiful flower garden

Add bits of nature: collect interesting leaves, flower heads, grasses, and maple keys and dry them between the pages of a book for two weeks or more. When dry, glue or tape them into your journal

A seasonal journal: a wonderful focus for your journal can be seasonal change. Choose subjects or places that change with the seasons, which can be as simple as a tree in your neighbourhood or an entire landscape

What to write: try writing down a question about each subject you draw. Include your impressions, thoughts, and feelings about your experiences in nature

Inspiration: don't worry about recording rare species or rare landscapes. Focus on the commonplace and nearby; start in your backyard. Nature journaling is a wonderful way to get to know where you live, and the creatures that inhabit that space during the different seasons. Focus on the stories of your natural neighbours

When time or weather doesn't work: when you don't have time to make a field sketch, you can always take a picture of the subject and draw it later at home. •