

STARTER PROGRAM – AN INTRODUCTION TO NATURE

The best place to start anything is from the beginning and nature introduction starts with plant life. Why? Easy...because plants don't run away! The key to any effective learning experience is through creating context. Steps should always be taken to contextualize the learning material for ease of understanding and recollection of knowledge gained. The more stops along the way, the more opportunities for creating memories.

Goal: To familiarize yourself (or your students) with the local plant life in your area and start your adventure in nature. Differentiate between native and introduced species of plant life and take initiatives to enhance green spaces with more native plant species.

Resources/Materials:

Pencil

Journal/Notebook

Library access or local plant-life books/field guides



START SOMEWHERE FAMILIAR

Look for plants in your local area. This is the first step in understanding plant life. Discover what habitat the plants live in.

What other plants are in the area? Is the plant you're studying in a shaded area or does it grow in the sun? Making connections to forests or park areas you're familiar with will make it that much easier to recollect the lessons learned later. *(If you don't have a familiar place where there are a lot of plants to discover, then now is the time to visit a place and get familiar with it. Visit often to make the memories vivid.)*

CHOOSE A PLANT TO STUDY

Once you have explored your familiar piece of wilderness, pick a plant for study, but don't pick the plant itself. Our goal as participants of nature is to leave it undisturbed for everyone to enjoy. Adopting the practise of "Leave No Trace" allows you the future opportunity to study these plants again and see how they grow and affect their environment.

Use your pencil and notebook to make as detailed an account for your chosen plant as you can. The more detailed your notes and drawing, the easier it will be to identify your plant later.

Note: You may be tempted to simply take a picture of your plant instead of drawing it. Taking a picture is a passive way of collecting information as it takes no real study to collect. *What is more active, lying down on your stomach to inspect the tiny serrated edges on your plant's leaf or pinching out with your fingers to zoom in on your picture?* Remember, we're trying to add context to our learning. The more active and physical your study can be, the more effective your later recollections will be to trigger memories and contextual learning.

TIME TO RESEARCH

It may seem silly, but don't use the internet to research your chosen plant. Once you've collected your research, head to the library and find books on local plant life in your area. The more steps it takes to search for your answers the more opportunities you create for context and memories associated with the goal/learning. While looking for your mystery plant, you may come across other plants that you also saw, enabling context for other species study later on.

GATHER YOUR FINDINGS

Once you've identified your plant, compare your findings with others (If doing the activity as a group) and create a plant map or catalogue for your neighbourhood. In the future you can plan an event to introduce more local plant life in your community or connect with an elder to see what kind of plants they remember from growing up and how they may have been used.