

Take a Hike!

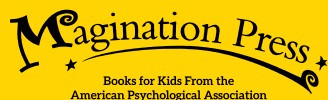
AND OTHER WAYS TO DE-STRESS AND RELAX IN NATURE



- | MIND, BODY, SPIRIT ACTIVITIES
- | EASY ACCESS NATURE
- | DREAM DESTINATIONS
- | TOUCHING GRASS (BUT NOT POISON IVY!)



Take a Hike



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Published by Magination Press in partnership with National Wildlife Federation
maginationpress.org and nwf.org

Distributed by Lerner Publisher Services
lernerbooks.com

Written by Kate Chynoweth
Edited by Katie ten Hagen and Julie Spalding
Book design by Chris Gaugler
Produced by WonderLab Group LLC
Printed by Corporate Graphics, North Mankato, MN

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Chynoweth, Kate, author.

Title: Take a hike! : and other ways to de-stress and relax in nature / by Kate Chynoweth.

Description: Washington, DC : Magination Press, [2025] | Audience term: Preteens | Audience term: Junior high school students | Summary: "This tween-friendly handbook encourages kids to seek out nature for health benefits and planet protection. Kids who spend more time in nature benefit in mind, body, and spirit! And likewise, benefit the Earth"—Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2024038587 (print) | LCCN 2024038588 (ebook) | ISBN 9781433845208 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781433845215 (paperback) | ISBN 9781433845222 (ebook)

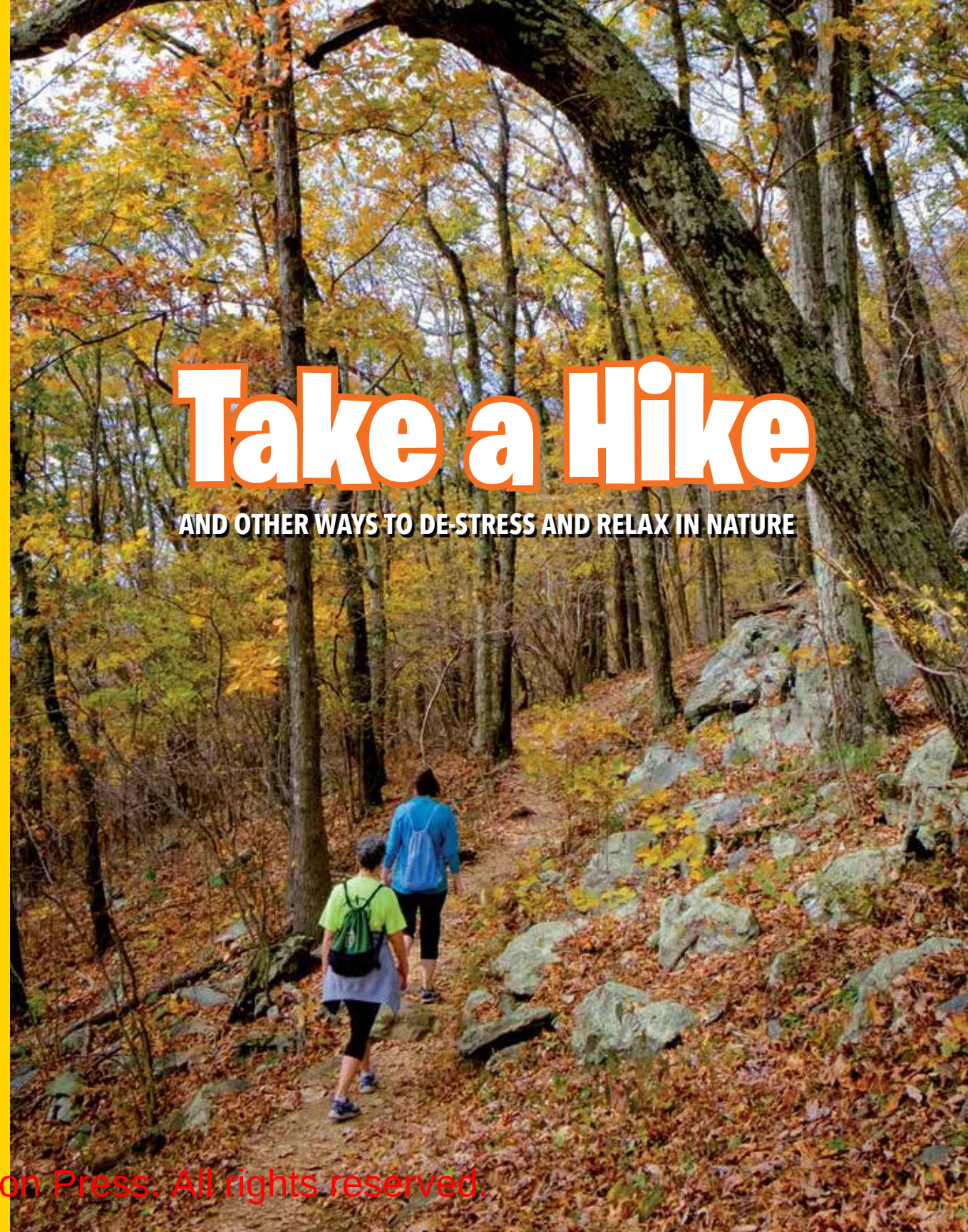
Classification: LCC BF353.5.N37 C468 2025 (print) | LCC BF353.5.N37 (ebook) | DDC 155.91—dc23/eng/20240911

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024038587> | LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024038588>

Manufactured in the United States of America
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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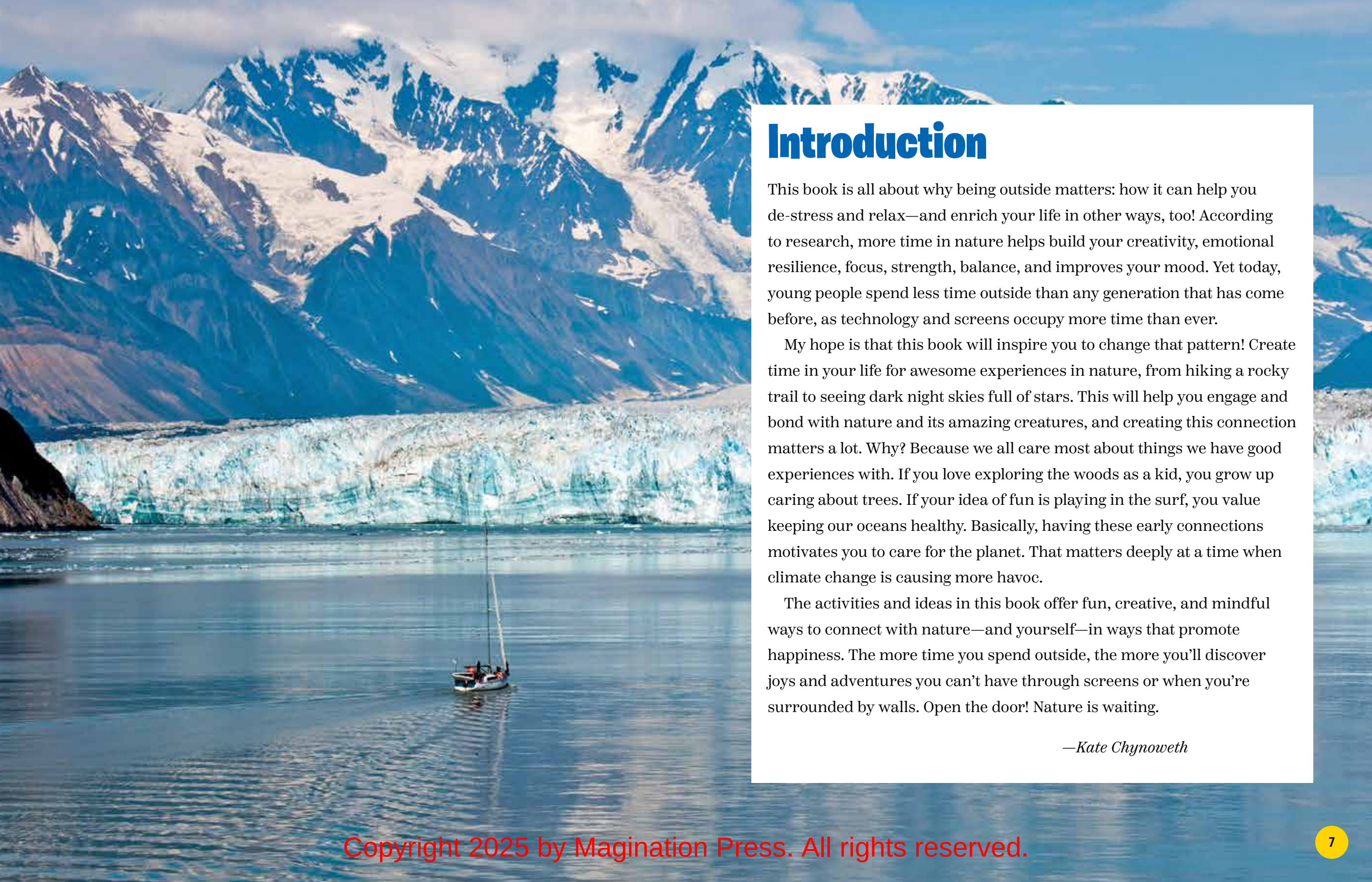
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Introduction

This book is all about why being outside matters: how it can help you de-stress and relax—and enrich your life in other ways, too! According to research, more time in nature helps build your creativity, emotional resilience, focus, strength, balance, and improves your mood. Yet today, young people spend less time outside than any generation that has come before, as technology and screens occupy more time than ever.

My hope is that this book will inspire you to change that pattern! Create time in your life for awesome experiences in nature, from hiking a rocky trail to seeing dark night skies full of stars. This will help you engage and bond with nature and its amazing creatures, and creating this connection matters a lot. Why? Because we all care most about things we have good experiences with. If you love exploring the woods as a kid, you grow up caring about trees. If your idea of fun is playing in the surf, you value keeping our oceans healthy. Basically, having these early connections motivates you to care for the planet. That matters deeply at a time when climate change is causing more havoc.

The activities and ideas in this book offer fun, creative, and mindful ways to connect with nature—and yourself—in ways that promote happiness. The more time you spend outside, the more you'll discover joys and adventures you can't have through screens or when you're surrounded by walls. Open the door! Nature is waiting.

—Kate Chynoweth

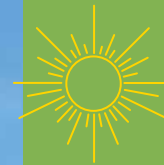
How to Use This Book



Activity sections give you ideas for outdoor pursuits and nature-related crafts that are relaxing and fun.



Natural Wonders sections explain more about some of the amazing natural phenomena that exist on our planet.



Climate Spotlight sections highlight creative solutions and technologies helping combat the negative impacts of climate change.



Science Says sidebars investigate how science can explain or assist with questions about nature.



Make a Mini Habit sidebars offer easy ideas for small, simple actions you can take to have a positive impact on the health of our planet.



Dream Destinations sections offer ideas for places you might go for the outdoor experience of a lifetime. If you won't be traveling soon, many of these destinations offer live cameras where you check out views and wildlife action from the comfort of home.

Nature All Around



Spending time in nature benefits you in lots of ways, from building your creativity, strength, and balance to simply making you happier. And it's all around us! Even if you live in a busy city or suburb, birds fly through the skies and squirrels scamper in the trees.

This chapter is packed with ideas for activities you can accomplish in easily accessible nature areas, the kind that are usually not too far from your front (or back!) door. Whether you take a walk in your neighborhood or visit a local park, playground, or community garden, there is always fun to be had. As you spend more time outside, you will see for yourself how nature can be a positive force in your daily life.



What's your favorite thing to do outdoors?

If you're short on time, don't forget that little moments count, too, like taking a short walk around the block or eating outdoors when the weather is warm. Put away screens and take notice of what's around you, especially in spring and summer when bright flowers pop up even in tiny sidewalk cracks!

The types of flowers you see will vary depending on the climate where you live. In the north, you might see shasta daisies and lilacs, while heading south you might spot azaleas and orange blossoms. In the west, bright poppies flourish, while in tropical Hawaii, yellow hibiscuses bloom. Some flowers, like black-eyed Susans and sunflowers, are common across all of the United States!

Make a Pressed Flower

For this activity, look for common flowers that grow wild in parks, near playgrounds, or on roadsides, always steering clear of gardens you don't have permission to pick from.

What You'll Need:

Fresh flowers

Wax paper, plain tissues, or printer paper

A heavy book, like a dictionary

Activity:

1. Pick delicate, colorful flowers with thinner stalks, like daisies, pansies, or poppies; these work best for pressing, while thicker flowers such as roses do not (although you can just press the petals, if you like). Select flowers that are not wet.

2. Flip to the middle of the heavy book. Place a piece of paper inside the book on a page where you'll arrange your flowers. Some flowers can bleed color through paper, so you may want to add extra paper to each side for additional protection.
3. Position your flowers on the paper inside the book, spreading the petals flat. If you plan to press more than one flower, space them evenly to avoid overlapping.
4. Place another piece of paper on top of the flowers. Close the book carefully and place more heavy books or objects on top to add weight.
5. Leave thin, delicate flowers to dry in the book for one to two weeks, or four to six weeks for larger flowers. You will know the pressing is complete when you carefully open the book and find the flowers perfectly flat and dry.



Green is good for you! Scientists are learning through new studies the positive impacts of being in green space. Some of the interesting findings include:

- | Views of nature are **restorative**. A view of treetops from a window can help high stress levels drop lower within minutes!
- | Outdoors can be a space where you get to make your own rules and pursue how to play, on your own schedule. This promotes creativity and **resilience**.
- | Running, jumping, swinging, climbing: you play harder outdoors than indoors. While you're in the fresh air having fun, you are also building strength, honing balance, and developing other essential physical skills.

FUN FACT

Over 50 billion birds currently live on Earth!



Species Identification With AI

Species identification is a complex science that classifies and names **organisms**. But you don't have to be an expert botanist or trained biologist to identify the many plants and animals around you, thanks to the identification apps available now on smartphones.

These tools are the result of artificial intelligence (AI), which can absorb huge databases of information and images. Since AI data isn't always correct, many apps also rely on engaged users to download their own pictures and identifications to create information that's even more accurate.

This remarkable technology makes it easier than ever to learn fascinating details about other species who share the planet. Even scientists use these apps! For example, some apps provide an effective way to track the arrival of **invasive species**, so that a **conservation** and rescue plan might be put in place. Ask for an adult's help to learn more about one of these apps:

- ✓ Merlin Bird ID: identifies bird species; if you have a computer instead of a phone, check out the partner website, All About Birds
- ✓ Seek by iNaturalist: identifies animals, fungi, and plants, and has fun chances to earn badges for observation



Rivers and Streams

If you've ever seen a big river—and most big cities are built near or even right on top of one!—you might have wondered: Where does all that water come from, anyway?

Rivers begin as smaller bodies of water called creeks, which travel and grow into streams. When streams merge together, flowing faster and faster down toward sea level, they eventually form a river.

Waterways change with the seasons. If you have rivers, creeks, or streams nearby, make time to quietly **observe** them at different times of year:



Spring: Walk along the edge of a creek or stream to spot frog eggs or tadpoles. Keep an eye out for fluffy goslings and ducklings paddling alongside their mothers.

Summer: Wade into the water to get a closer peek at aquatic plants

and creatures, from frogs to lily pads. Or, try fishing if you have the opportunity.

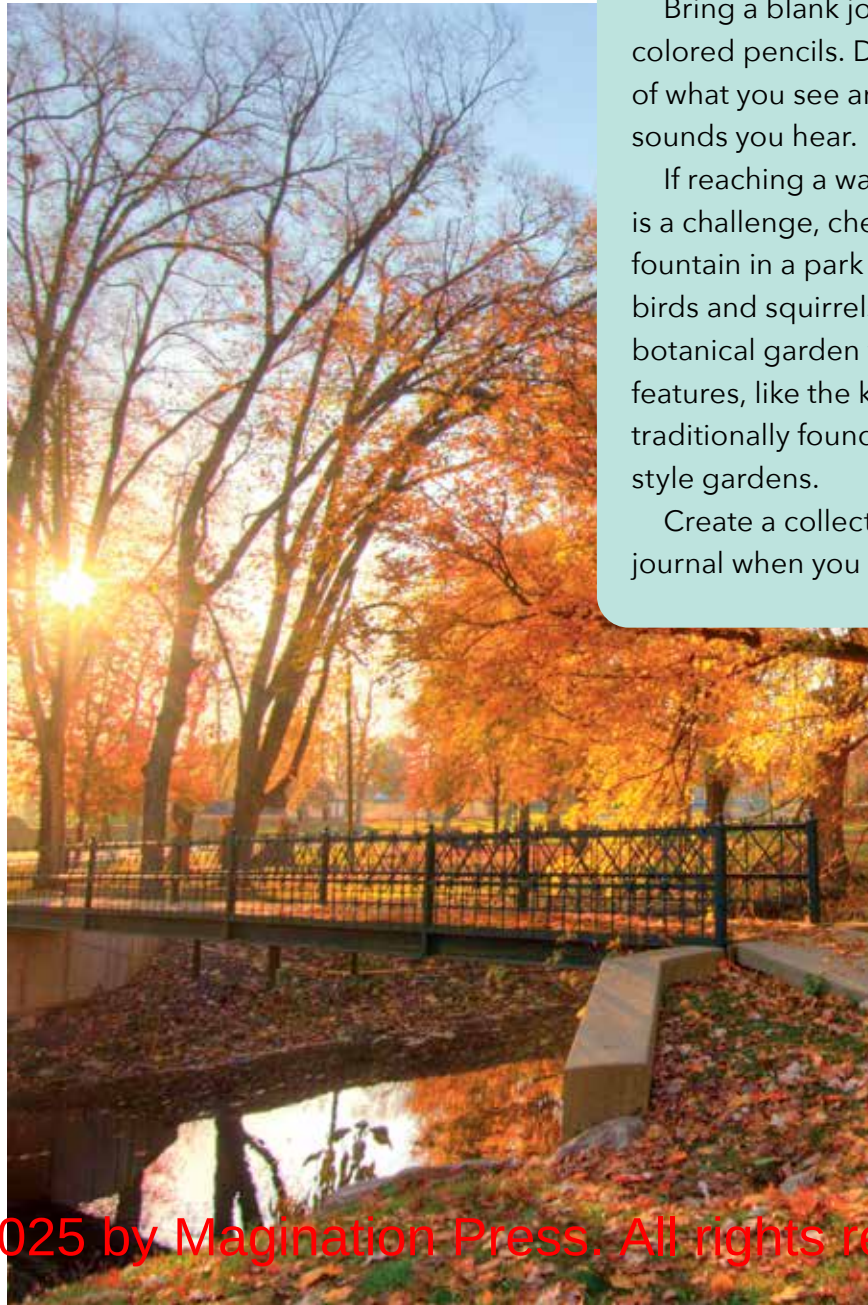
Water Journaling

Spend 20 minutes walking along a shoreline, or in the summer, float on an inner tube, paddle board, canoe, or kayak.

Bring a blank journal and colored pencils. Draw pictures of what you see and note the sounds you hear.

If reaching a water destination is a challenge, check out a fountain in a park that draws birds and squirrels, or visit a botanical garden with water features, like the koi pond traditionally found in Japanese-style gardens.

Create a collection of experiences by bringing the journal when you will be near the water.



Fall: Watch for changing water levels. By autumn, all the snow in the mountains has finished melting and is no longer flowing into streams below.

Winter: Notice how the water habitat changes in cold weather. Does the surface freeze? If you spot fewer animals and birds, look for what they leave behind instead, like tracks, droppings, dens, or dams.

Does your neighborhood

have access to a park with big trees, a waterfront path, or a greenway bike trail? Take note of interesting outdoor places like this (always let an adult know if you're going to visit one)! Or, simply look outside and identify the plants and animals you can see from your window. Nature is all around—and exploring is fun!



Neighborhood Nature Map

In a few short steps you can create a simple map of your neighborhood that highlights nature areas.

What You'll Need:

Graph paper or blank paper
Something to draw with
Ruler
Compass (physical or app)

Measuring tool
(tape measure or app)
Small notebook

Activity:

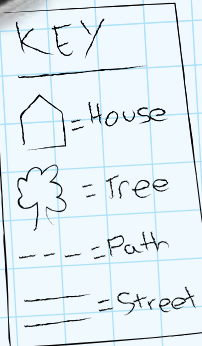
1. Find north: Use a physical compass or a map app on a smartphone to find the true north direction in your neighborhood.
2. Near the top of the paper, draw a **compass rose** with the north arrow pointing where you found it to be. Add arrows for the other corresponding directions: east, south, and west.

3. Look out the window, or walk around the neighborhood.

In a small notebook, write down landscape features that catch your eye. What size are the houses or buildings, and how many are there? Are there trees? Is it hilly or flat? How much of the sky can you see overhead?

4. Draw and label a square that represents your house or building. Then draw and label your street.

5. Create a map key to add interest to your map. Choose symbols to represent specific features you noticed, like a favorite tree, playgrounds, bright flowers, or areas where squirrels or birds gather. Finally, add and label symbols from your key, and any shapes or other features you noted.



Dark night skies are an essential part of life’s rhythms—but you might hardly notice them! That’s partly because artificial light is all around you, from the light you switch on in the morning to the bright screens of laptops and phones.

Get extra time away from artificial light and screens, especially in the evenings, and see how it affects you. And always turn off the light before you go to sleep: Research shows even a small amount of light hitting your eyelids shifts you to a more alert state and disrupts your sleep cycle.



FUN FACT

Just like the Earth has earthquakes, the moon has moonquakes! Moonquakes are weaker but can last for hours.



Moon and Mood Tracker

The phases of the moon might remind you of your own moods, which change from day to day (sometimes minute to minute). What emotion do you feel when you observe the night sky? Writing down daily observations about the moon, and about your feelings, is an easy practice that can help you feel more in touch with yourself and more at peace.

What You’ll Need:

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| Journal or notebook | Ruler |
| Pens or pencils | Binoculars (if you want more detailed observations) |
| Colored markers | |
| A moon phase chart | |

Activity:

1. Print a moon phase chart from an online source and paste it in your journal, or draw one yourself.

2. Look at the lunar calendar and select a date to begin your journal.
3. Create a page in your journal for each day of the month. Leave space on each page so you can write down the date, time, and moon phase, plus room to write down things you observe. For example, is the moon bright or hidden by clouds? Does it have a halo or an unusual color?
4. Add one more section for your feelings. Consider starting each journal entry with how you feel before you observe the moon, and end with how you feel after.
5. Go outside and record your observations. Here’s where you’ll use binoculars, if you have them. Continue the practice each night for a month.
6. Use colored pencils or markers to decorate each page.

Tip: If weather gets in your way, or if you don’t have a good moon-viewing spot, check NASA’s interactive map, the Daily Moon Guide, to view the moon every day of the year.



Being outside is a great counterbalance to daily life, partly because in nature there are fewer distractions. Your mind has a chance to relax when you are away from the overstimulation of noise, screens, lights, or crowds. You might find yourself daydreaming and enjoying other creative paths of thought. The next time you're feeling stressed, try lying down in the grass to watch clouds glide past overhead, or gaze out a window. Take slow, deep breaths, and just focus on the views of nature. Notice how your body feels before and after.

MAKE A MINI HABIT

9

USE YOUR GREEN THUMB

Commit to cultivating a new houseplant! It greens your space and improves indoor air quality. Pothos, monstera, or spider plants are good starter options, because they're not fussy about needing the perfect amount of sun. (Avoid overwatering by waiting until the soil is dry before you water them again.)



Wishing Tree

An outdoor wishing tree is made by hanging small slips of paper onto branches with string. Each paper contains a handwritten wish. What might you wish for? It's fun to think of silly ideas, but also good to consider what you may truly want for yourself, for someone you love, or for the planet. Try making your own indoor wishing tree.

What You'll Need:

Large roll of paper, such as butcher or easel paper

Construction paper in different colors

Scissors

Double-sided tape

Pencils, markers, or pens

Activity:

1. Cut a large tree trunk shape from the paper. Make it tall enough to be noticeable on a wall or door. Using the same paper, cut branch shapes.
2. Attach the tree trunk to the middle of a door or wall with tape. Attach branches all around the trunk in the shape of a tree.
3. Cut out leaves from construction paper in a variety of shapes, using green or a mix of colors.
4. Write your wishes on the leaves and attach with the tape. Stash extra blank leaves and pencils near the project, and invite anyone passing by to write a wish and attach it.

