



# Planning a Nature Walk

by Sheila Carroll

Once a month I conduct a nature walk for homeschoolers in my area. Each time we meet at a different spot and have something special to watch for during the walk. All the families who participate look forward to getting out into natural surroundings—moms and kids alike.

It has been fun to plan the walks as well. At first I planned most of them. Now, moms are making suggestions and offering to help. The idea of walking each time in a different place has made us all look at our area with new eyes. We have uncovered many little known corners of our county, some with lovely gardens, or a small stream or even land held by the local Nature Conservancy. In the depths of winter in Michigan we make arrangements to go someplace indoors. One trip to the University greenhouse revived our spirits remarkably; another trip took us to the herpetology lab (lots of snakes and lizards!). The all-time favorite was an early spring froggin' expedition. We found a large pond swarming with tadpoles. Donning our rubber boots and with strainers in hand we waded in. There were lots of soakers and laughing. It was a perfect time to have a lesson on keeping and releasing frogs.

During our November walk we focused on identifying the four basic types of evergreens. All the leaves were off the trees and it was just right time for seeing the evergreens. To prepare, I typed a description of the four types of evergreens (see below), and had a copy for each family and a small sack in which to collect the samples. This particular walk was good for the young ones because they were able to see a large green tree easily. After everyone had collected a small sample, we went back and did a rubbing of each type and labeled it. The finished piece then went into each child's nature notebook. A suggestion about collecting samples: children need instruction on how to take evergreen samples without harming the tree. In fact, a lesson on how to gather (or not to gather) plant matter without harming the surroundings is an important one.

Here's the description of the four types of evergreens for your nature walk...

## NEEDLE KNOWLEDGE

- If the needles are pointed and growing in bunches with each group stuck together at the bottom by a little papery strip you are looking at a pine. Only pine trees grow needles in clusters.
- If the needles are stiff and sharp and growing all around the branch, it's a spruce tree. Spruce needles actually have four sides.
- If the needles flat and short with rounded ends and are growing opposite each other on the branch it's either a fir tree or a hemlock tree. But now look at the trees top. If it is straight and pointed like a big spear you found a fir tree. If the top is sort of droopy looking the tree is a hemlock.
- If the needles are actually branches or twigs covered by tiny flat green triangular leaves, the tree is either a cedar or a cypress.

From:

*Nature Crafts for Kids: Fifty Fantastic Things to Make with Mother Nature's Help*,  
Gwen Diehn. Sterling Publishing, 1992

For those of you who would like to have a group nature walk in your area, here is the wording I use in my flyer:

Nature Walk: A once a month a “nature walk” is planned for any families interested. It is the second Thursday of each month (except where noted) 2-4 pm. The goal (a la Charlotte Mason) is to allow children to really look at nature. No teaching, just looking and sharing a bit. Children of all ages are welcome. This is an amble through the woods not a power walk. In severe weather (wind, hail, snowstorm, you get the idea) we would cancel. However, some mild weather (such as rain) can be a time to look as well. I will send an email reminder with directions before each walk.”

If you do plan a walk in your area, would you let me know? It would bless me to know others are enjoying something similar. Email me at [info@livingbookscurriculum.com](mailto:info@livingbookscurriculum.com)

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