



Getting Started With Nature Journaling

What's a nature journal?

Nature journals are a place to record our observations of nature. This can include words, drawings, additional research you've done, reflections on what you've observed, and so much more. It is also a practice that anyone can do.

Why start a nature journal?

Nature journaling is a way to:

- Deepen your connection to nature and the land
- Share your love of nature with others
- Grow your ability to speak knowledgeably and passionately about its conservation

Setting a nature journaling goal:

There are many reasons to keep a nature journal. You may be looking for a new hobby, hoping to increase your knowledge about certain plants or animals, or wanting to develop your sketching abilities. Consider what your goals are to help you decide where to put your energy.

What do I need to get started?

- Notebook/sketchbook
- Pencil (2B graphite is nice to have) and an eraser
- Pen (ideally waterproof)

Optional art supplies (start with what you already have):

- Sketching pencils
- Good-quality sharpener
- Blender (a rolled paper blending tool)
- Drawing pens (various thicknesses)
- Pencil crayons, watercolour pencils
- Watercolour paints



Make your own kit to head outside with ease:

- Backpack or other sturdy bag to hold your kit
- Mechanical pencil and eraser
- Pocket-sized sketchbook
- A few extra pieces of thick paper
- Clipboard
- Small ruler
- Portable measuring tape
- Binoculars
- Hand lens or small magnifying glass
- Waterproof nature identification cards or field guides
- A few resealable plastic bags
- Sit spot cushion or camping stool

Supplies to aspire to:

- Extra shades of the colours you are seeing around you (you can never have enough greens)
- Water brush for working easily with watercolours on the go
- Portable/outdoor easel
- Stylus pen for annotating photos and sketching on your smartphone or tablet

Field guides:

To help you identify what you're seeing, you might want to build up your collection of nature field guides. In the meantime, see what's available to borrow from the library or your local nature centre. You can also download identification apps such as [iNaturalist](#), [Merlin Bird ID](#), or the new [BugFinder](#). Logging your entries can be a great way to contribute to citizen science. Don't forget that you can search with an image on Google as a first step to identifying what you are seeing.

Can't decide what to focus on in your nature journal?

Spend a week exploring your personal preferences before deciding. Choose one of the prompts below to help guide you:

- Make a hand-drawn map of a place in nature nearby that is special to you. Add elements to your map throughout the week until it feels complete.

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*Click on the words highlighted in green and underlined to link to the related web resources.



- Keep a nature gratitude journal. At the end of each day, list three good things that you noticed in nature.
- Commit to taking a few photos each day of something in nature that catches your attention.

After 7 days, look back through your journal and see what activities you've tended to be drawn to. Do you notice any patterns? You don't have to stick to one focus forever, but it can be helpful at the start to not feel as if you can't keep up with your own observations. If nothing stands out after a week, keep going, or just experiment with a few areas of interest until something sticks.

Basic details to include with each journal entry:

- Location (be specific)
- Time of day
- Weather conditions
- Questions that come up or things you'd like to investigate further (your own nature mysteries)

New to nature journaling?

To help you get into the habit, keep your first few entries simple and quick. If you haven't drawn in a long time, give yourself permission to mess around without judging. Your drawing skills will only improve with observation. Here are two ideas to get you started:

- Head outside, stop, and look up for two minutes. Then look down for two minutes, and then look around for another two minutes. On the spot, write down some short point-form notes of what you noticed from each perspective or draw a quick sketch.
- Focus on one sense at a time—sight, touch, hearing, smell, and maybe even taste. Record an observation for each of your senses or focus an entire entry on one sense, returning at a later time for a different sensory experience.

Your First Month of Nature Journaling

Pick a few prompts that appeal to you. You don't have to do them all. Have fun!

- Create a colour swatch for your location. This might be something that you add to daily or review your photos over a period of time to see which colours are most present. Use any colouring art supplies you have available or find matching colours to cut out from magazines to create your swatch.



- Complete a series of quick gesture drawings of birds or small animals.
- Make tree bark rubbings and then try to identify the tree based on their bark.
- Pick one word each day to succinctly describe a moment in nature. You might even make up your own word. When you have a collection of words built up, try writing a haiku poem.
- Keep a daily list of the birds that visit your feeder.
- Take photos and identify the insects in your garden, especially the ones eating your plants.
- Create an inventory list of all the plants growing in the sidewalks around you and track their life cycles.
- Have a window thermometer? First thing when you get up, record the temperature (without consulting your phone). Or why not make your own rain gauge to keep track of rainfall in your area?
- Head out each evening and track the phase of the moon.
- Look out for edible plants that can be foraged nearby at this time of year and research corresponding recipes. What better way to understand your terroir?
- Create a sound map. Spend 10 minutes sitting in silence and write down what you hear. It doesn't matter if you can't identify what's making the sound, but be sure to include on your map where the sound is coming from and a short description or phonetic spelling for what you heard.
- Estimate the age of any trees you encounter regularly and then research how to determine their age. Find out how accurate your guesses were.
- Come up with your own weekly nature mystery, a question you're curious about, and keep observing until you uncover the answer.

Looking back:

At the end of the month, look back on your entries to remind yourself of everything that's happened and think about where to go next. Here are a few suggestions for digging deeper and closing out the month.

- Complete one section of your [phenology calendar](#).
- Do a more detailed drawing or painting of your favourite observation that month.
- Pick a few photos for a curated digital photo album.
- Share some of the favourite things you are noticing on social media, write a blog post, or provide updates to other nature lovers in your life.
- Volunteer with a local environmental organization that can use your knowledge.
- Start putting together your own [nature prescription calendar](#).
- Consult the internet or field guides to further explore your looming nature mysteries.
- Find a way to celebrate your ongoing commitment to building your relationship with nature.



Creative journeys from home

A few of Emma's favourite books/journals to inspire you:

- “The Laws Guide to Nature Drawing and Journaling” by John Muir Laws
- “The Big Book of Nature Activities: A Year-Round Guide to Outdoor Learning” by Drew Monkman and Jacob Rodenburg
- “How to Make Hand-Drawn Maps: A Creative Guide with Tips, Tricks, and Projects” by Helen Cann
- “The Nature Instinct: Relearning Our Lost Intuition for the Inner Workings of the Natural World” by Tristan Gooley
- “The Naturalist's Notebook: An Observation Guide and 5-Year Calendar-Journal for Tracking Changes in the Natural World around You” by Nathaniel T. Wheelwright and Bernd Heinrich
- “A Gardener's Journal — A Ten Year Chronicle of Your Garden” from Lee Valley
- “Among Trees: A Guided Journal for Forest Bathing” by Timber Press

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