

No Grown-up Left Inside

There has been a lot of buzz in recent years about the need to connect children with nature. You might have heard about efforts to pass the No Child Left Inside Act that would increase funding for environmental education. You can read books about how to connect kids to nature, buy adventure kits to give to children, and even take Internet classes to hone your skills. I've been watching the trend. I think that one of the simplest ways to connect kids to nature is to be sure that adults are connected to nature themselves. Whether you have kids in your life right now or not, connecting (or reconnecting) to nature will benefit you and those around you.

The other day, I looked up from my computer and realized that I had been inside for a straight 8 hours! I had woken up, eaten breakfast, gone out to the garage, and left in my car. When I got to work, I hustled to the building. By the middle of the day, I didn't even know if it was raining, if it was snowing, or if the sun was shining. Does that sound familiar?

During the warmer months, it's easier to get outdoors. There's gardening, picnicking, and longer days with many outdoor events. But once winter gets a grip, we tend to hunker down and stay inside. Here are some simple ways to bring a little more of the natural world into your daily life this winter. If you are able to share your discoveries with another person (big or small), that would be great. But don't think you have to do this for someone else, do it for yourself!

- Take care of some houseplants. Grow herbs in your windowsill and use them in cooking. Try to keep a poinsettia alive for a whole year! Plant a flowering bulb in a pot and watch it emerge and bloom.
- Follow the phases of the moon. Look for a new crescent moon rising in the east in the morning and setting in the west in the evening. A full moon rises at sunset and sets at sunrise. The last quarter will rise around midnight and set around noon.
- Place a birdfeeder near a window and watch feathered and furry animals that visit. If you don't have a feeder, sprinkle seeds on the snow.
- When it gets really cold, curl up with a good nature book. Read Aldo Leopold's *Sand County Almanac* or Hal Borland's *Book of Days*.
- On the way to your car or mailbox, look at the snowflakes on your coat sleeve. Watch how the snowflakes change as the temperature and humidity change during the course of a storm.
- Hurry up spring by clipping a few small branches off a forsythia, apple, or pussy willow. Bring them indoors and place them in water. Change the water frequently and recut the stems if needed. Can you force the flower buds to open early? Share some with a neighbor.
- During a snowstorm, watch a nature program! Order the Planet Earth series from the library and be amazed at this place we call home!
- Next time you are at the grocery store, look for a new fruit or vegetable to try. Have you ever cut a persimmon crosswise? Buy a bag of mixed nuts still in the shell. As you crack them open to eat them, marvel at nature's amazing seed packages.
- After a snowfall, look out the window for animal tracks. You might be surprised how many animals live in your neighborhood.
- Listen to nature's music. Your library probably has CDs with recordings of bird songs, frog calls, thunderstorms, and other natural sounds.
- By February, you can start watching for the first signs of spring. The branches of willow trees will change color. Starlings' beaks will become more yellow. Chickadees will change their

"chick-a-dee-dee-dee" songs to their "fee-bee" whistles. What other clues do you see in your neighborhood?

- Visit the Domes!
- Watch the weather. Remember some of those old weather sayings such as "Ring around the moon; snow is coming soon." Check to see if weather sayings can accurately predict the weather.

And finally, get outside whenever you can! The Havenwoods grounds are open 6 am to 8 pm. Come to parking lot and roll down your window for a breath of fresh air! Or, better yet, take a brisk walk and enjoy nature in winter.