

Nature Near You

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Living in Colorado, it's easy to assume that everyone goes to the mountains to appreciate nature. But, that's not always the case. Driving into the mountains takes time, money, and gas. So, what are some ways we can appreciate nature where we are?

One of the easiest things to do is to step out your door and look around for the nature you see. It may be the grass near the sidewalk or a tree in a neighbor's yard. Slowing down and looking at these natural elements can create a moment in nature.

While grass has a lot of climate impacts we worry about in Colorado, if you have a patch of grass, take a seat. Sitting in grass can give you a few moments to connect to the earth. What does it feel like? What do you see? Who lives there? This summer there were an abundance of little grasshoppers; in sizes from tiny to large. Sitting in the grass usually disturbed someone. Who do you see in the grass near you?

While you're in the grass, do you see a dandelion? While dandelions are often treated as pests, they also have many healing properties. And they teach us about community, deeply rooted while spreading out and sharing. Dandelions have become a symbol for social justice work.

Do you see that tree? What kind is it? What is it's wood used for? What color do it's leaves turn? Is it an evergreen? The simply act of figuring out what kind of tree you're looking at can be a practice of noticing nature. Going one step further and researching why that kind of tree is here, and how it fits in with the Colorado ecosystem, can help us learn more about nature.



Then there's appreciating a tree. Have you ever hugged a tree? Give it try. We know that trees have forms of communication. They are interconnected with the world around them. They also go through their own annual lifecycle. Coming alive in the spring, moving sap through their branches; and slowing down for winter. How do the visible cycles of deciduous trees reflect the changes you go through during the change of seasons? While COVID has kind of blurred our days together somewhat, observing the changing of the trees can help us reconnect with those natural rhythms.

101 Fact Sheet



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What about water? Is there water somewhere near where you live or work. Many times we can find a stream or viaduct that wanders through our neighborhoods. Around that water is it's very own ecosystem. You may find fish, frogs, ducks, or other wildlife. Waterways connected to open spaces may even have larger animals stop by to get a drink.

As you start to investigate the water near you, look around and notice what you see. What kinds of plants are there? Flowers? Berry producing plants? What kinds of trees like to live near the water? Is the shoreline clean or does it need some help? If you are feeling adventurous, would you like to touch the water or get your feet wet? If it's a larger body, what would it mean to go wading or swimming?

What do you hear? While this may be harder in a busy urban area, listening to water can be soothing a meditative. Is this water calm, flowing quietly, or is its path interrupted so it burbles and splashes as it moves? Water can show up in so many lovely ways in our environment. Take a look around and see if you've missed some water near you.

Do you have a park near you? Not sure. One quick way is to put your address in Google maps, zoom out, and see where your parks and open space are located. There may be one right down the street that you've never visited. Have you ever driven past an open space but never stopped? No all places have these green spaces available. Take some time to visit your local open space. You may even find you can walk to it through a trails system in your neighborhood.

If you live in Denver, you can visit this site to Find A Park:

<https://www.denvergov.org/content/denvergov/en/denver-parks-and-recreation/parks/find-a-park.html> Many cities and suburbs have a parks and recreation division. Visiting their websites can help you locate spaces near you.

The beautiful thing about nature is that it's all around us. So next time you're out doing errands, taking a walk, or picking up the kids from school, see if you can find something new in nature.

Look for color – flowers, foliage, and other kinds of color show us different species, plants, and purposes. Look for different textures – some plants are fluffy, some look like they have sharp edges. Look for how things grow – some flowers grow one to a stem, some grow in clumps, and some plants always grow with other plants. Where can you find patterns, complimentary species, and beauty?

Nature is a gift. Nature is our home. And nature is all around us. Making the connection to nature can be part of our daily practice; a regular part of how we move through the world. Let's all take some time to connect to the nature near us.