



# **Magic Forest Academy**

## **Nature Journal Prompts**

## INTRODUCTION

Keeping a Nature Journal can be a life long activity that returns many benefits. Imagine in your later years looking back on journals of natural history documented from your perspective. The natural world changes over time and it's appreciated by all if there is record to reflect back upon.

Instilling the love of keeping a Nature Journal at an early age will also benefit children in many ways. It encourages them to train their eyes for careful observation and opens the doors to asking questions in the spirit of investigation. Because nature can be seen at many angles, a child's Nature Journal will be individual to them and instill a sense of independence.



*We have created a listing of 13 different Nature Journal prompts across all four seasons, giving you 52 prompts in all. The prompts are designed so that you may print them and use in various ways; for example, you could tuck each of the prompts in to a Journal Jar per season to pull one per week to use as inspiration, or you could cut and paste the prompts to individual pages in a blank journal so it is ready to fill with writing, sketches, paintings, and more. Keep a journal by season or by nature theme. There are many ways you can use these prompts for inspiration, just use your creativity and imagination!*

*"Teaching children about the natural world should be seen as one of the most important events in their lives." - Thomas Berry, The Dream of the Earth*

*"Children learn best through their everyday experiences with the people they love and trust, and when the learning is fun, and the best place for these experiences is outdoors, in the natural world" – Center for Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning*

**“Look deep into Nature, and then you will understand everything better” – Albert Einstein**

# TREES



**Create a Family Tree in your journal showing as many generations as you can.**

- Find a tree near your home with blossoms or buds. Update your journal with sketches of what you think the blossoms or buds will grow in to next season, then after they bloom check your journal to see how accurate you were.
- What types of insects do you see living on or around the tree?
- Update your journal with instructions and diagrams on how to identify various tree types, and then identify the various trees visible from your home. If you have no trees at home, then flip through magazines and identify at least 5 different trees in pictures.

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**Take a photo of the tree you picked for your journal.**

- Go on a nature hike or visit a public park and update your journal with a drawing of one tree and explain why you picked this tree.
- Make a list of all types of trees you see in the same area as the tree you picked.
- Identify the various ways trees are useful and how they are used.

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**Make bark rubbings in your journal**

- Go on a nature hike or visit a public park and observe the trees. Are there any berries or fruit on the trees? What kind?
- Are leaves falling from the trees? What are the leaf colors, sizes and shapes.
- What types of animals do you see living on or around the tree? What are the animals doing?

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**Make a sketch of winter trees in your journal.**

- Go on a nature hike or visit a nearby park and observe the trees. Mark out a specific area and count how many trees are Deciduous versus Evergreen. How did you tell the difference? Make a drawing of at least one of each tree type.
- Are there cones or nuts on the ground? Describe how trees use cones and nuts to continue their lifecycle and draw a diagram of a tree lifecycle in your journal.
- Select at least 3 trees and identify how old they are, and update your journal with how you calculated the age.

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# ROCKS



**Gather, clean and dry smaller rocks, then paint designs on them. Take photos for your journal**

- Go on a nature hike and find a special rock. Update your journal with why this rock is special to you and make a chart to describe its characteristics; such as its color, size and texture.
- Test your special rock to see if it is magnetic and update your chart.
- Learn how to identify rock 'Luster', 'Hardness' and 'Streak' and update your chart with these characteristics of your special rock. Once you have your chart completed, update it with more rocks you find or have.

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**See how many rocks you can balance on top of each other. Take a photo for your journal**

- Go outside and find the largest rock you can in the morning. Is it warm or cool? Check the temperature again in the afternoon and document if it is warm or cool. Why do you think the temperature changed?
- Learn what types of minerals and gemstones are native to your area and update your journal with the list and sketches or pictures, and information on what the minerals are used for.
- Head outdoors looking for fossils in rocks and update your journal with your findings. If you find no fossils, try a fun craft making your own fossil imprints. Try sketching images of fossils in your journal and labeling what they are fossils of.

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**Arrange smaller rocks outdoors into artwork. Take a photo for your journal.**

- Head outdoors and find a rock to safely turn over. What nature did you find living beneath the rock?
- Turn another nearby rock over and see if there are different types of nature living beneath it. Update your journal with your findings and list other creatures that may make their home beneath a rock.
- Draw an imaginary circular area and count how many rocks you find in the perimeter, including the smaller rocks. Update your journal with your findings. Were you surprised to find so many rocks?

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**Draw a diagram in your journal illustrating how to play Rock, Paper, Scissors, then have fun playing with friends.**

- Update your journal with the difference between Igneous, Sedimentary and Metamorphic rocks. Include a diagram showing the differences.
- Head outdoors and try to identify at least 10 different rocks by their category.
- If you were a rock what type would you like to be and why? What if you were a crystal or mineral?.

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# REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS



**Update your journal with sketches of frogs and toads and try to spell out the 'sound' they make**

- Observe a nearby pond and its surroundings and sketch a diagram in your nature journal. Include plants and trees surrounding the pond.
- Sketch or collage pictures of amphibians you spot at the pond, or that you know are living there but may not have seen.
- Learn the difference between a toad and a frog and update your journal with your findings. Include a sketch of their lifecycle.

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**Update your journal with a list of how litter hurts wildlife, including Sea Turtles, and ways we can reduce waste.**

- Learn about Sea Turtles and their life cycle. Update your journal with sketches, collages, and/or narrative writing about what you learn.
- Learn the difference between Tortoises and Turtles and list them in your journal. If you do not have turtles or tortoises readily available for viewing in your backyard or nearby park, try visiting a Nature Center or organization that rehabilitate them. Update your journal with what you learn. If you have no place to visit you can try viewing a documentary.

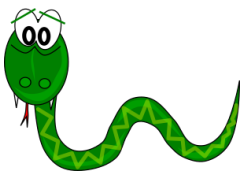
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**Learn how to make Lizard Origami and make one or two to tuck inside your journal.**

- Learn where lizards and salamanders live and then look for each on nature hikes, documenting your observations. Include markings and color patterns found on each.
- Draw and list the differences between Salamanders and Lizards.
- Research and document which species are protected by your local and national government and why.

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**Read fictional books about snakes for inspiration; such as, Verdi or Rikki Tikki Tavi, or write your own!**

- Learn about snakes native to your area and update your journal with information and sketches of markings and color patterns.
- Visit a wildlife rescue or other organization that handle snakes, and ask questions about snake behavior, diet and more. Update your journal with what you learn.
- Learn how snakes are beneficial to ecosystems, then update your journal with lists or pictures displaying what you learn.

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# MUSHROOMS



Learn how to make Spore Prints and include a print in your journal.

- Go on a nature hike and take photos or sketch mushrooms you find. Research and label their species and characteristics in your journal. Remember not to touch any mushrooms with bare hands since many can be poisonous.
- Try to find at least one Bell shaped cap and one Honeycomb capped mushroom and learn the species for your journal.
- Document the air temperature and humidity level you found your specimens in, and if you can, take a temperature reading of the ground. Update your journal each season with these details.

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Try growing a fungus specimen safely at home to observe up close and update your journal with your experience

- Measure a large radius circular area outdoors and count how many different types of mushrooms you find, documenting your results in your journal. If you find none, find a new location.
- Head back a few days later to the same area above where you found mushrooms and perform a recount. Update your journal with your findings. Repeat this step several times over the weeks to learn how diverse the mushroom world is and how quickly new ones grow.
- Try to find at least one Cone shaped cap and Rounded cap mushroom and update your journal with the species of each.

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Flip through several classic fairy tale books and see if you can spot mushrooms in the illustrations.

- Learn how to safely collect mushroom specimens and how to dissect at home. Update your journal with your findings, including what it was growing on, if it was by itself or clustered, and if it has any specific smell.
- Try to find at least one Convex and one Funnel shaped cap and update your journal with details of each species.
- Research the parts of a mushroom and sketch a diagram in your journal.

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Make a dye using mushrooms from the grocery store and tie-dye an old shirt.

- Name at least two reasons mushrooms are important to nature and document in your journal.
- Sketch a picture of a mushroom providing shelter to insects.
- Research the mythologies and stories associated with the Fly Agaric red capped mushroom and document your findings.

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# BIRDS



**Put a Bird Feeder outdoors and observe the type of food different birds prefer, then update your journal.**

- Observe birds in their natural outdoor habitat, and identify at least 5 different types of birds, sketching them in your journal. You can use a Bird Field Guide to assist in your sketching.
- Sketch pictures of bird nests, bird eggs and bird feathers in your journal; either ones you find outdoors or in books and magazines.
- Research rare birds in your area that you may not see, but that could be living nearby. Sketch their picture and learn the sounds they make.

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**Put a Bird Bath outdoors and observe which types of birds use it, then update your journal.**

- Set aside a specific time each day for one week to observe outdoor birds, keeping a tally in your journal of how many of each type of bird you spot. Update your journal daily with the results.
- Observe a perched bird and sketch it in your journal. Label all the parts of the bird and list the types of food it likes to eat.
- Observe birds after a good rain and update your journal with any new behaviors you noticed.
- Research the types of birds that live on, or near, beaches and update your journal with drawings and information.

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**Learn how to perform Bird Call with your hands and practice outdoors. Update your journal with your experience.**

- Research Birds of Prey in your area and see how many you can spot during Autumn. Update your journal with sketches and information; such as, their sleep patterns, homes, food, predators, prey, etc.
- Observe or research migratory birds and update your journal with information you learn. Document each time you witness birds migrating with the date and details of your observation.
- Update your journal with any new types of birds you notice this time of year and any different behaviors they display than in other seasons.

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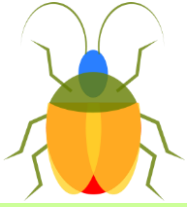


**Make edible ornaments for birds that you can hang outdoors. Update your journal with the recipes!**

- Copy famous poems about birds into your journal, ensuring you give author attribution, and also try writing your own poem.
- Research various types of footprints different birds make and update your journal with pictures or drawings. If it snows, try to photograph bird footprints for your journal.
- Participate in the Great Backyard Bird Watch (GBBW) in late winter and update your journal with the results you submitted.

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# INSECTS & SPIDERS



**Build an Insect Hotel as an observation spot, updating your journal with your observations.**

- Visit a meadow, observing the types of insects, spiders, and other arthropods you find. Update your journal with sketches and details.
- Quietly observe bees in an outdoor garden or meadow. Update your journal with the various types of bees you can identify, and draw pictures of their favorite types of flowers.
- Draw an imaginary circle in the ground of a garden or meadow and count how many types of insects hop versus fly versus crawl and update your journal.

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**Create a nighttime Moth Viewing area by hanging a white sheet and shining a flashlight behind it, updating your journal with details.**

- Count the various types of moths and butterflies you observe over a week or month and draw pictures of your favorites in your journal, labeling the various anatomical parts.
- Place a plate of rotten fruit outdoors and observe it periodically for the types of insects frequenting the fruit. Update your journal with your findings.
- Sit quietly and listen to the types of sounds the insects make and then make up a poem or song to write in your journal.

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**Make an Insect Viewer with an empty glass jar to view insects up close, updating your journal with details.**

- Study the trunk of a tree, updating your journal with the types of insects and spiders you find. Do a comparison study of the types of insects and spiders you find crawling around the root area. Update your journal with your findings.
- Find a spider web with an active spider in it that you can safely observe and update your journal with your observations. Draw the spider and label its parts. Draw pictures of a Sheet Web, Orb Web, Funnel Web and Cob Web and circle the one your spider was on.
- Safely turn over a dead log or dead leaves. Update your journal with the insects and spiders you observe and list the types of foods they eat.

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**Keep a houseplant indoors to observe in late winter for emerging insects, updating your journal with details.**

- Research at least 10 types of insects that survive in the winter and update your journal with drawings and details of each.
- Write the definition of 'Invertebrate' and 'vertebrate' in your journal, drawing several pictures of each in your journal.
- Draw a picture of ants nesting underground during the winter and imagine what they might be dreaming about. Draw a dream bubble over the sleeping ants and sketch what you imagined.

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# MAMMALS



**Create an outdoor scavenger Hunt to enjoy when you're out looking for animal tracks.**

- Research at least 3 types each of a small, medium and large mammals living near you, updating your journal with details; such as, what type of homes they live in, their diet, anatomy, prey, predators, etc.
- Go on a nature hike and observe the various mammals and their tracks, updating your journal with sketches and details.
- Update your journal with sketches of your favorite mammals and include the Adults and Babies for each, listing what the adults and babies are called.

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**Visit a wildlife rescue to learn more about local mammals, updating your journal with what you learn.**

- Visit a local pond, river or lake and update your journal with drawings or photographs of mammals that appear. Look up their scientific name and write both their scientific and common names next to their picture.
- Research the difference between 'Domestic' versus 'Wild' mammals, updating your journal with a list or pictures of each.
- Research the types of habitats various mammals lives in, updating your journal with sketches of each habitat and a list or drawings of the mammals that live in each.
- Update your journal with the types of mammals that live in the ocean.

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**Put out a squirrel feeder in your garden and update your journal with your observations.**

- Go on a nature hike and closely look for signs of mammal life; such as, claw marks on branches, animal tracks in the mud, broken twigs, emptied nutshells, droppings, etc. Update your nature journal with a list, photo's or drawings of your findings.
- Find an outdoor area to observe what mammals are doing to prepare for winter and update your journal.
- Research how bats are unique mammals, and update your journal with information you learn, including drawings of various types of bats. Highlight any bats that live in your area, and see if you can visit a bat center or build a bat house, updating your journal with what you learn.

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**Build an indoor den to hibernate in for fun, and use it as a space for updating your journal with hibernation facts.**

- Draw a picture of your favorite animal in your journal and label the anatomical parts. Write a short story about your animal to include in your journal.
- Create a journal page showing the difference between predators and prey and document some of the ways prey will protect themselves. Identify if any of these animals are endangered and what that means.
- Learn more about 'Hibernation' and update your journal with animals hibernate, how they hibernate, and why they hibernate.

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# WEATHER



Create paper flowers and decorate a journal page with your flowers.

- Learn what the various Cloud Formations are properly called and document them in your journal with drawings and labels.
- Learn what the Water Cycle is and update your journal with a diagram.
- Update your journal with a list or drawings of your favorite things to do during or after a Spring rain. Include a description of how Spring rain is different than rain in the other seasons.

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Update your journal with drawings or photo's of what your favorite summer time activities are.

- Learn how lightning is formed and update your journal, including diagrams of various types of lighting. Include updating your journal with Lightning safety.
- Learn the various old-time ways farmer's predict the weather, updating your journal with a list of ways.
- Learn about the benefits of sunshine to humans and update your journal, including a list of guidelines for sun safety.

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Fly a kite in an open field or beach on a clear windy day. Update your journal with a photo or drawing of your kite.

- Compare the climate where you live with another geographical area that is at least 2000 miles away and record the weather differences in your journal.
- Learn what the tell tale signs of Autumn weather are and update your journal with pictures or a list.
- Imagine if the seasons went directly from Summer to Winter, with no Autumn in-between. Think about the favorite parts of Autumn weather you would miss and update your nature journal with your list.

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Cut out paper snowflakes and decorate a journal page with your cutouts.

- Learn the difference between freezing and boiling point and update your journal.
- Learn at least 6 different Winter Weather terms and then document how many of these you can spot during the last winter month. Update your journal with your findings using words and pictures.
- Update your journal with the types of clothing required to stay warm in winter weather, then update your journal with how animals stay warm in winter.

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# FLOWERS



**Glue pressed flowers in your journal, labeling what each flower is with both their scientific and common name.**

- Find at least 3 different weeds that are also flowers and document if they are edible or not next to drawings of each.
- Use a Q-Tip/Cotton-Swab or your fingerprint to create a flower bouquet in your journal. Draw the vase around your bouquet.
- Update your nature journal with sketches or cut-outs of the first flowers of Spring that blossom. Add other types of flowers that blossom in middle and late Spring, arranging the pictures in order of appearance in nature.

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**Have a Sunflower Contest by growing several next to each other to see which one grows the tallest. Update your journal with the results.**

- Learn the difference between Spring and Summer flowers and update your journal with your findings using words and pictures.
- Learn how flowers are pollinated and update your journal with illustrations.
- Draw a picture of your favorite Summer flower and label all of the parts.

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**Grow or buy a variety of Flowers and practice your flower arranging skills. Update your journal with photo's or drawings of your arrangements.**

- Update your journal with drawings or photo's of 5 flowers that bloom in Autumn. Create a drawing of a bouquet that has at least one of each of these flowers.
- Learn how to say and spell 'Flower' in 6 other languages and update your journal with these new spellings.
- Visit a local Florist who is willing to teach you more about flowers and arrangements. Update your journal with your experience.

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**Repurpose old jars or cans into vases to display winter flowers. Make the flowers out of paper then update your journal with photo's or drawings.**

- Identify 5 flowering plants that bloom in Winter and update your journal with pictures or drawings of each.
- Learn at least one Flower mythology and update your journal, including which culture the mythology comes from.
- Update your journal with a listing of the many ways flowers are used in society today. Use illustrations to demonstrate how they are used.

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# LEAVES



Learn how to make Leaf Skeletons and place some in your journal, or find Leaf Skeletons outdoors to use.

- Go outdoors and safely look at the underside of leaves. Update your journal with anything you find interesting that is attached or living beneath the leaves. Take photo's for your journal if you can.
- Learn how leaves get their green color and update your journal. Draw several pictures of leaf types in their Green state, then next to each draw them in the color they turn in Autumn.
- Learn what 'Leaf Margins' are and update your journal with drawings and information.
- Look for 4-Leaf Clovers to tuck inside your journal.

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Update your journal with leaf rubbings from a variety of leaves.

- Collect at least 5 different types of leaves and cut them in half lengthwise. Glue one half of each to your journal, and then complete each leaf by drawing the other half. Update your journal with what each type of leaf is.
- Learn what Poison Ivy and other poisonous plants are and update your journal with pictures and information on how to identify their leaves. Include First Aid information as well.
- Update your journal with drawings or pictures of 6 different edible or medicinal leaves, and how they are used.

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Collect colorful leaves and preserve them with paraffin wax before placing a few in your journal.

- Update your journal with the date that the leaves start changing color and then the date that the leaf colors are at their peak. Add dates for when they start falling and when the trees are completely bare. Repeat this journal entry each year to compare dates.
- Once the leaves are in their color-changing peak, draw an imaginary circle outdoors and count how many of each color you find. Update your journal with a graph chart showing the results.
- Learn how fallen leaves are beneficial and update your journal .

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Make a wreath of evergreen leaves to hang indoors.

- Collect and dry a variety of leaves remaining in early winter and then paint decorations on them. Hang them up as bunting, and also put a few in your journal.
- Once the Winter Solstice passes, head outdoors to identify evergreen leaves. Update your journal with sketches, as well as listing what animals may use the leaves for food.
- Learn how to identify a tree based on characteristics of Leaf Scars on Twigs. Collect several twig samples and try identifying the tree, updating your journal to check back in Spring and Summer to see if you were correct.

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# NIGHT



Have a slumber party with friends playing traditional nighttime slumber themed games. Update your journal with your experience.

- Learn what important Celestial Events are occurring throughout the year and update your journal with events and dates. Include Equinoxes, Solstices, Eclipses, Meteor Showers, and more.
- Observe the early evening sky to spot birds returning from migration and update your journal with your observations.
- Learn what flowers and plants bloom at night and update your journal with drawings of each.

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Go camping and enjoy the experience of nature sounds at nighttime. Update your journal with sketches of the creatures that make each nighttime sound.

- Update your journal with information on what a Meteor Shower is, including sketches or pictures of what they look like.
- Update your journal about the Summer Solstice and what it means in regards to the amount of daylight on this day. Learn about ancient landmarks built around this celestial event and update your journal with drawings or photo's of these monuments.
- Learn more about Sunrise and Sunset and update a journal page with both events showing how they may appear.

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Create lanterns out of empty tin cans or glass jars and go on a Lantern Walk with your friends. Update your journal with your experience.

- Learn about the planets in our Solar System and update your journal with pictures and information, including which seasons certain planets are visible in the night sky.
- Learn about nocturnal animals and update your journal with sketches of each animal, labeling each one and highlighting some of their behaviors.
- Some Nature glows-in-the-dark through a process called *Bioluminescence*. Research plants, animals and insects that glow-in-the-dark and update your nature journal. Try using glow-in-the-dark paint on pictures you draw so they glow as well!

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Learn how to make Hand Shadows at night and update your journal with shadow patterns you created.

- Learn about the Moon Phases and update your journal showing each phase pictorially. Research special names different cultures give each moon and add this information to your journal.
- Learn about Constellations and update your journal with what you learn, including your favorite Constellation and why it's your favorite.
- Update your journal about the Winter Solstice and what it means in regards to the amount of daylight we will start to experience from this date. Learn how various cultures celebrate this Solstice event and update your journal with details of these traditions.

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# SEEDS



**Create and decorate empty seed packets to take with you so you can safely store any seeds you find. Place one seed packet in your journal.**

- Collect dried seeds in early spring to grow again later. Place a collection of one of each seed in your journal and sketch the flower or plant grows into.
- Grow a seed in an observation container and document the phases of growth using sketches and labels until it is fully grown.
- Tape or glue the back of one seed packet in your journal. Label and describe what each section of the back packet means.

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**Place a handful of Bird Seed in a growing container and water it to see what grows. Update your journal with your results.**

- Grow a Sunflower and update your journal weekly showing its progress. Once your sunflower is fully grown, harvest the seeds, updating your journal with how many seeds you harvested.
- Identify at least 10 edible seeds with their name and a photo or drawing.
- Put a variety of seeds on a tray outside for birds to eat, recording which seeds were mostly eaten each day. Try to determine which types of birds are eating the particular seeds and update your journal with drawings of the birds.

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**Look for 'Helicopter Seeds' when you're outdoors and play racing games with pairs to see which lands on the ground first. Tuck one seed in your journal to keep.**

- Learn the various methods of Seed Dispersal and update our journal with pictures and explanations of each method.
- Create a pictorial Seed Type chart in your journal, showing pod, bur, nut, acorn, and hairy, and any other types you can learn about.
- Learn how to roast Pumpkin Seeds and update your journal with a recipe.

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**Create ornaments using cones and acorns to hang indoors. Take photo's or create drawings of your ornaments in your journal.**

- Go on a nature hike observing the various cones in trees and on the ground. Learn how cones produce seeds and update your journal with sketches of each type of cone you find. .
- Learn about how the Kokopelli myth is related to Heirloom Seeds, Spring and Winter and update your journal with your discovery, including a drawing of Kokopelli and his seed sack.
- Make a Winter Squash Stew and save the seeds from each type of squash you use. Dry and paint the seeds then glue them in a pattern on cardstock to create a bookmark for your journal.

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# FRUITS & VEGETABLES



**Make Garden Markers for either your own, or a friends, garden. Take photo's or make sketches of your garden markers for your journal.**

- Find out what fruits and vegetables are local and seasonal to you and update your journal with your list, showing which months they grow.
- Perform an experiment to learn how plants absorb water by placing a celery stalk base in a jar of colored water that allows you to see the colored water moving from the base to the top. Update your journal with the experiment, including photo's or illustrations.
- Regrow lettuce by placing the stump in a bowl of shallow water placed in sunlight and watch it grow over time. Document the results in your journal.

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**Grow a small windowsill Herb garden, updating your journal with photo's or sketches.**

- Learn about 'Companion Planting' and update your journal with a sketch of a vegetable garden you can grow using companion planting.
- Learn more about herbs and update your journal with illustrations and details. Include dried pressed herbs in your journal.
- Research what 'exotic' fruits and vegetables are and update your journal with what you learn, including where each is geographically grown.

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**Learn how to make Apple Prints and press some into your journal.**

- Research vegetables that are really 'Fruits', and vice versa, and update your Journal with what you learn.
- Find a 'Pick Your Own' farm or a farm you are allowed to pick the fruits and vegetables, and update your journal with your experience.
- Learn how to dye fabric with juice from fruits and vegetables and try tie-dyeing clothes and fabric with natural dyes. Update your journal with photos or sketches of your creation.

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**Learn how to make Pomanders and make them to hang indoors. Take photo's or draw sketches of them in your journal.**

- Learn which fruits and vegetables you can eat all winter and why it's important to your health. Update your journal with your findings, and sketch pictures of your favorite fruit and vegetables.
- Take a nature hike and identify berry fruits blooming in winter that wildlife depend on, updating your journal with your findings.
- Make a Winter Vegetable Stew using winter root vegetables and update your journal with the recipe and also the difference between root vegetables and tubers.

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