



Wild
ABOUT
nature
Field Guide
to Fun





GREETINGS FROM THE 2020 WILD ABOUT NATURE COMMITTEE!

For the past eleven years, on the first Saturday in November, Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast hosted the Wild About Nature Festival on the shores of Little Sarasota Bay at Bay Preserve. Every year this event brings together environmental and youth-serving organizations in our community to connect kids to the beauty and fun of our natural world.

As circumstances dictated a different type of event this year, we embraced the challenge of turning this 1,000+ person festival into something new. Thus, the Wild About Nature: Field Guide to Fun activity book was born!

Our goal is that the activities filling these pages will help you connect with nature in new and unexpected ways. This guide serves as a handy resource for you to reference for years to come. We look forward to gathering safely again for this annual event in the future. Until that time, we hope you use this book as your very own field guide to go wild about nature!

Sincerely,

THE 2020 WILD ABOUT NATURE COMMITTEE

Kerri Deatherage | Randi Donahue | Jaime Goulet | Jason Owens
Kristen Paulus | Sam Peterson | Christina Rogers-Hehr | John Witte

We extend a special thanks to the following organizations for bringing this book to life with their activity contributions:

Coastal and Heartland National Estuary Partnership | Florida Native Plants Nursery
Junior League of Sarasota – Kids in the Kitchen | Mote Marine Laboratory & Aquarium
Myakka River State Park | Oscar Scherer State Park | Sarasota Audubon Society
Sarasota Bay Estuary Program | Sarasota County Libraries and Historical Resources
Science and Environment Council of Southwest Florida | Sunshine Community Compost
The Bishop Museum | The Children’s Garden | UF/IFAS Extension Sarasota County



Field Guide to Fun

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CREATE

- 4** Fun with Constellations
- 6** Weave with Nature
- 8** Recycled Plastic Bottle Flower
- 10** How to Compost
- 12** Build Your Own Parfait
- 14** Nature Critters
- 16** Trail Mix

ENGAGE

- 17** Marine Science
- 18** Mindfulness Nature Walk
- 19** Ornithology
- 20** Let's Plant for Birds, Butterflies, Bees and Bugs!
- 22** Wildlife Biology
- 24** Nature Photography
- 25** Forestry

EXPLORE

- 26** Adventurer's Checklist
- 28** SEC Watershed Audio Tour
- 30** Special Places Interactive Map
- 32** Sensory Scavenger Hunt
- 34** Pollinator and Wildlife Plants Scavenger Hunt
- 36** Wrack Line Explorers
- 37** Photo Scavenger Hunt at Myakka River State Park
- 38** Library Scavenger Hunt



A group of stars that seem to form a pattern is called a constellation. For this activity, you will create these patterns, normally seen in the night sky, inside with a constellation flashlight! There are 88 official constellations, many of which were named after animals or mythological characters by ancient Greek astronomers. Throughout history, they have been very helpful to people navigating across lands and oceans and to farmers who relied on them to keep track of planting and harvesting seasons. Constellations seem to move across the sky, but this is actually due to planet Earth moving as it rotates on its axis.

✓ Supply List:

- Constellation templates (on the next page)
- paper and pencil
- a flashlight
- a rubber band
- a push pin (or other pointed object),
- aluminum foil
- a 12- to 20-ounce cup (foam, paper or plastic; not clear)
- duct or masking tape
- scissors

➔ Instructions:

- 1.** Use paper and pencil to copy the constellation templates on the next page or to draw your own pattern.
- 2.** If your flashlight has a reflective cone around the bulb, unscrew the top, cover the cone with tape, and screw the top back on.
- 3.** Cut off the bottom of your cup, and make sure your flashlight will fit inside.
- 4.** Cover the mouth of the cup with aluminum and secure it with a rubber band.
- 5.** Lay your constellation copy or drawing over the foil. Using a push pin, poke holes through the picture and the foil wherever you see a star.
- 6.** Insert the flashlight into the bottom of the cup. You may need to wrap tape around the edges to ensure a snug fit. Turn the flashlight on and aim it at the wall in a darkened room.
- 7.** If your star pattern is not clear, try pointing your flashlight to the side of the inside of the cup rather than directly at the foil. Secure with tape if needed.





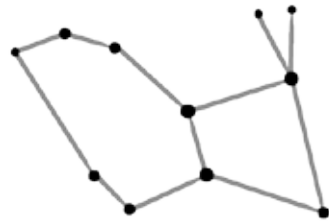
Orion
The Hunter



Taurus
The Bull



Leo
The Lion



Lepus
The Rabbit



The Bishop Museum of Science and Nature

As the largest natural and cultural history museum on Florida's Gulf Coast, The Bishop Museum of Science and Nature offers fun and engaging exhibitions and programs that interpret the scientific and cultural knowledge of Florida, the world, and our universe. The Bishop includes an all-digital Planetarium, the Parker Manatee Rehabilitation Habitat, and the Mosaic Backyard Universe, built especially for children and their families. Visit BishopScience.org for hours, info, and admission details or call 941-746-4131.



This is the perfect nature project for wild crafting. Go for an enchanted walk outdoors and collect nature finds along the way to incorporate into your creation. Feel free to use any yarn or string you have at home, but to make it really special and unique, try natural dye! Before there were modern chemical dyes, people colored their clothing with dyes made from plants and natural materials. This project is adaptable for a wide range of ages, but younger ones should ask an adult for help with the stove. Be sure to thank Mother Nature for her gifts and collect thoughtfully!



Supply List:

- Yarn (white cotton yarn is recommended for dyeing)
- Nature finds, such as grasses, flowers, acorns, leaves, and seeds
- A sturdy branch with at least one forked end
- Natural dye materials—You can use turmeric, beets, tea or coffee, red cabbage, and onion skins to create beautiful and surprising results!



Instructions:

- 1.** Go out in nature and find a forked twig or branch.
- 2.** Tie yarn to one end of the branch and wrap back and forth between the forked ends, doubling around on each side to keep taut.
- 3.** Weave in natural objects like leaves, flowers, acorns, and seed pods.

NATURAL YARN-DYEING INSTRUCTIONS

- 1.** Prepare white cotton yarn to hold your dye by adding it to a pot with one part vinegar and four parts water.
- 2.** Bring to a low boil for one hour then rinse in cold water. Now your yarn is ready for color.
- 3.** Add water and natural materials to a pot with yarn. Bring to a simmer for one hour, then turn off heat.
- 4.** Leave yarn soaking in dye until you achieve your desired color, then wash in cold water and hang until dry.



The Children's Garden

The Children's Garden is designed for kids to imagine, explore, and make believe. We offer nature, gardening, and art programs. We encourage playing in the dirt! Our mission is "Keep Kids Connected to Nature!" Visit us online at sarasotachildrensgarden.com or find us on Facebook @SarasotaChildrensGarden to learn more!



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Create | Recycled Plastic Bottle Flower



Making flowers is a fun and creative way to use plastic bottles that would otherwise be recycled. They look especially beautiful when grouped together in a pot or placed among real flowers in your yard/garden. The decorating possibilities are endless and each flower is as beautifully unique as the amazing kid who creates it!



Supply List:

- Plastic bottle(s) - water bottle, Gatorade bottle, juice bottle, milk jug, shampoo bottle, etc.
- Scissors or a utility knife
- An adult to help!
- A drill (to create a hole in the cap for the stem)
- Something narrow and sturdy to use as a stem— a stick, piece of bamboo, a chop stick, a straw, etc.
- Decorating supplies



Instructions:

- 1.** Rinse your plastic bottle. Keep the cap and put it back on the bottle after rinsing.
- 2.** With an adult's help, use scissors or a utility knife to cut the bottle in half. Keep the top for the flower and the bottom for a future craft.
- 3.** With an adult's help, use your scissors to cut multiple lines from the cut edge of the bottle to the cap side. Cut down part of the way or almost all the way down to the cap. Anywhere from three to ten cuts will work well.

- 4.** With an adult's help, use your scissors to round out the edges of the flower petals. Be careful—thick plastic can be sharp! If the plastic is very thin and doesn't seem sharp, skip this step.
- 5.** With an adult's help, make the flower grounded by adding a stem. Use a drill bit slightly smaller than the stem and drill into the middle of the cap (or into the neck of the bottle) to create a hole for the stem. Insert the stem into the hole.
- 6.** GO WILD and decorate! Use markers like Sharpies (permanent markers work best), paint, or any other decorating supplies you have on hand.





PRO TIP: The secret to successful spinning is to stabilize the flower when it is whirled around. A plastic lid or piece of cardboard that fits snugly inside the bottom of the spinner works well as a stabilizer. Here's how to make one!

- 1.** Find a plastic lid or round piece of cardboard that fits snugly inside the salad spinner.
- 2.** With an adult's help, cut a starburst pattern of six to eight even lines (about 1 cm long) in the center of the lid. Don't remove any plastic from the center. This is where you will place the flower to secure it before your super spin.
- 3.** Put the stabilizer in the salad spinner.

TIME TO MAKE YOUR MASTERPIECE!

- 1.** Open the salad spinner and place your flower inside. If you made a stabilizer, place the middle (where the cap is) of your flower into the center of the stabilizer to secure it.
- 2.** Squirt the paint colors onto your flower.
- 3.** Close the lid and spin away!
- 4.** After a few spins, open the salad spinner lid to see how your flower looks. Add more paint and re-spin if needed.
- 5.** Remove the flower from the salad spinner and lay it out to dry. It may take several hours to dry.

For an extra special flower, try our favorite technique and use a salad spinner to decorate! The paint transforms the petals with super cool patterns and creates a gorgeous spin art masterpiece. With this decorating technique, you will want to wait until AFTER the flower has been decorated to add the stem (step 5 on previous page).

If you are fortunate enough to have a salad spinner, please ask your grown-up first if it is OK for you to use the spinner for this project. This is important because the spinner will likely need to be dedicated to crafts going forward.

Supply List:

- Salad spinner
- Paint



Wild About Nature Committee

The Wild About Nature Committee is a group of Conservation Foundation volunteers working to connect kids with the wonders of nature. From planning and preparation to event execution, these dedicated individuals donate their time and expertise to make the Wild About Nature Festival a success year after year. To learn more about Conservation Foundation volunteer opportunities, visit conservationfoundation.com/volunteer.



Composting teaches people how to participate with natural and regenerative cycles of life by taking organic materials and/or food scraps we can't eat and feeding them back to the planet to nourish the soil. It is an activity that gives people an opportunity to make a contribution back to the planet - the planet that gives us many gifts of life everyday including water to drink and enjoy, air to breathe, food to eat, resources to live off of and abundant beauty.

Composting is a way to transform food scrap "waste" into a nourishing, life sustaining resource that grows gardens, landscapes, community relationships and a healthy future. Composting reduces landfill waste and emissions, helps soil hold more water, reduces risk of run off and harmful nutrient concentrations in the watershed, brings awareness about the global tragedy of wasted food, and improves a community's ability to grow and access nutrient-dense local food.

YES! **Compost these items:**

- All fruit and veggie scraps: peels, skins, shreds, rinds, seeds, roots, tops, pulp, leaves, expired, frozen, canned, or cooked!
- Grains: oats, rice, bread, pasta, bagels, English muffins, flour, etc.
- Used coffee grinds and tea: grinds, filters, filter-based tea bags + string
- Paper towels/napkins: if used for food or edible liquids, do not compost if they contain inorganic materials or are bleached
- Crushed egg shells

NO! **Do NOT compost these items:**

- Animal products: meat, fish, poultry, pork, related stock, bones, misc. animal parts
- Dairy products: cheese, milk, sour cream, yogurt
- Fats, oils, or grease
- Plastics, twist ties, rubber bands

➔ Instructions:

- 1.** Set up your composting bin—make your own pile or containment system, or purchase one from a wide selection of options.
- 2.** Place broken up medium size sticks at the bottom of your initial system for air flow and a 3-6 inch layer of carbon materials (combo of dried leaves, straw, small wood chips, mulch, or shredded cardboard) on top of that to prepare the system to receive the first deposits of food scraps.
- 3.** Add your inedible kitchen food scraps or chopped up garden clippings to the pile (nitrogen materials).
- 4.** Always cover each new food scrap deposit with a small layer of carbon (carbon examples above in step 2).
- 5.** Maintain light moisture evenly across the composting materials so they stay “moist as a wrung out sponge.”
- 6.** Turn the pile with a pitchfork, shovel or by using the rotary function of the bin if it is a rotating system. Optimally it is mixed in this way one to two times per week for faster processing, but no less than one turn per month if you prefer more passive style composting.
- 7.** Every 3-12 months (depending on how much material you have and how you manage the material decomposition), you will have a batch of finished compost product to harvest, sift and add to your garden, house plants, landscape or share with friends.



Sunshine Community Compost

Sunshine Community Compost is a nonprofit organization that works with a wide range of households, schools, and organizations to create accessible education and action programs that increase local composting, resource recovery and zero waste efforts. Our work is focused on reducing as many forms of “waste” as possible by regenerating and transforming hearts, minds, relationships, resources and food scraps. To learn more or get involved, visit sunshinecommunitycompost.org, call us at 650.743.3104, or email info@sunshinecommunitycompost.org.

Create | Build Your Own Parfait



Mindful cooking and eating encourages children to feel excitement and curiosity while preparing food to nourish their bodies. This yogurt parfait recipe encourages children to make healthy choices while exploring new flavors. Make it a fun activity for the whole family!



Supply List:

- Yogurt
- Granola
- Variety of fresh fruit
- Honey
- Bowl or cup for your parfait
- Spoons for scooping and eating



Instructions:

Begin by sampling a variety of ingredients. Encourage kids to describe the different tastes, textures, and smells. Once everyone has their favorite ingredients picked out you can start assembling!

- 1.** Scoop yogurt into a bowl or cup
- 2.** Layer selected ingredients as you wish, alternating between yogurt, fruit, and granola.
- 3.** If you desire, add a bit of honey, or creative toppings like coconut shavings on top.
- 4.** Take your spoon and enjoy your healthy snack!

Fun Twists

Try a variety of yogurts (alternate options include Greek, vanilla, almond, coconut)

Try a mixture of common and unusual fruit such as berries, banana, mango, kiwi, pomegranate seeds, pineapple, etc.


Taste test and add a variety of fun & healthy toppings like chia seeds, coconut shavings, dried fruits, fresh mint leaves, etc.



Junior League of Sarasota's Kids in the Kitchen

The Junior League of Sarasota is an organization of women committed to promoting voluntarism, developing the potential of women, and improving the community through the effective action and leadership of trained volunteers. Its purpose is exclusively educational and charitable. Children's health and wellness has been a key issue since our founding. Our Kids in the Kitchen initiative is grounded in the belief that children and families empowered with the knowledge of how to feed and exercise their bodies will be less likely to become obese and subsequently suffer many associated health risks. To learn more visit jlsarasota.org



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Creating nature critters is a unique and engaging way to make art with sticks, flowers, leaves, stones, pinecones, or any other natural materials you come across in the great outdoors! This activity is fun for kids and adults of all ages and is a great way to incorporate imagination and creative play into your outdoor activities.

Let's get started!

- First, go outside! Remember to always check with your grown-up before leaving the house. Better yet, take them outside with you!
- There are two ways to approach your nature critter creation. You can either start with an idea of what type of critter you want to make – Will it be big or small? Scary or friendly? Happy or sad? Real or imaginary? – Or you can simply start collecting materials and see what kind of creature emerges!
- Once you've decided if you're going to plan your critter or wing it, start looking around for supplies to use in your creation. Remember, it's always best to use items you find on the ground rather than items you have to pull off trees or other plants.

Here are a few tips to help you get started:

- Pinecones, big leaves, and large rocks all make great bodies.
- Pine needles, twigs, and long leaves work well as arms, legs, antennae, and whiskers.

- Acorns, pebbles, berries, small flowers, and seeds can be used as facial features (eyes, mouths, etc.) or to make fun patterns on your creature's body.
- What other items you include will depend on what kind of creature you want to make. The possibilities are endless!

Now for the real fun, it's time to create your critter!

- Find an open space on the ground to spread out the supplies you have collected. Now arrange your nature finds so that they look like an animal, insect, or any other creature your heart desires!
- If you want, you can give your creature a name and backstory to add to the fun. Who is this critter? How did they get here? Where are they going next?
- Once you're done with your nature critter creation, leave them in the wild as a fun surprise for the next person who comes along. And of course, don't forget to take a picture!



Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast

Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast protects land and water in Southwest Florida for the benefit of people and nature. Working with landowners, businesses, and government, Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast saves land forever, protecting those special natural lands that make this region extraordinary. Learn more at conservationfoundation.com.



**Get outside with our
Next Gen Conservation
programs!**

Nature Explorers is all about getting little hands on the land! Families are invited to participate in fun community science projects on public lands. For kids from kindergarten to 5th grade, these programs are free and open to the public.

Youth in Nature connects under-served youth with the great outdoors through partnerships with numerous local organizations. After-school programs become adventures that can last a lifetime!

For more information on our youth programs, check us out on social media or visit conservationfoundation.com/nextgen.





Trail mix is the swiss army knife of nature snacks. It's sweet, salty and healthy. Most importantly, trail mix provides the energy and nutrition you need while you're out exploring the world.

Typically, you'll find nuts, seeds, grains and dried fruit in a trail mix, but you can include many more fun and tasty ingredients when you mix your own. You really can't go wrong when making a trail mix. Just remember to be brave and adventurous when selecting your ingredients!

✓ Supply List:

- Measuring cups (if you feel like being precise)
- Mixing bowl
- Reusable snack bag

Essential Ingredients:

- ½ cup peanuts
- ¼ cup pepitas (pumpkin seeds or other seeds)
- ¼ cup cup dried berries

Brave Ingredients:

- Sesame sticks
- Chopped up chocolate bar/M&Ms
- Pretzels
- Chocolate, peanut butter or butterscotch chips
- Coconut flakes
- Dried mango or pineapple
- Popcorn
- Walnuts, brazil nuts and almonds

➔ Instructions:

1. Add your ingredients to a mixing bowl.
2. Mix carefully and thoroughly.
3. Store your mix in individual reusable snack bags or an airtight container (should last 3-4 weeks depending on your ingredients).



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Marine scientists work in a wide variety of fields and locations. They may explore the ocean with first hand observations or remotely using technology. Marine scientists may study the life in the oceans (plants and animals) or the movement and chemistry of the water itself. They can be found in aquariums, laboratories, on boats in the water, or they may be environmental educators, teaching others about the marine world.

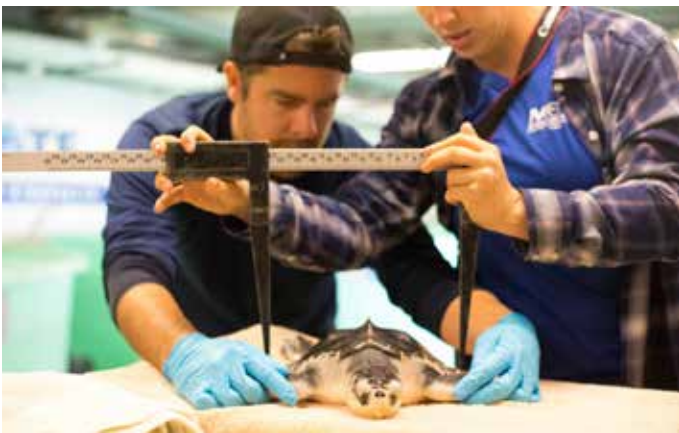
Marine scientists are curious and strive to answer questions about the ocean, the environment, animal conservation and everything in between. To seek out answers to these questions, marine scientists can blend their knowledge of psychology, chemistry, mathematics, biology and more!



Marine science skills you can try at home

Observe:

- Watch wildlife in a natural habitat for ten minutes and record what it does and where it goes
- Go fishing with a net or fishing pole



Experiment:

- Create waves in a container, try to place barriers to reduce the wave height
- Explore the density of different liquids (soap, water, milk, oil, etc.) by dropping household objects (coins, paper clips, popcorn kernels, etc.) into the liquids and observing if they sink or float

Evaluate:

- Temperature of nearby water body
- Water body conditions (wavy, calm, clarity, tide level)
- Use a science tool
- Build a model of ocean technology (water tester, remotely operated vehicle, boat)
- Magnifying glass or microscope



Mote Marine Laboratory & Aquarium

Mote Marine Laboratory is an independent, nonprofit marine research institution comprised of world-class marine scientists committed to the belief that the conservation and sustainable use of our oceans begins with research and education. We are scientists, explorers and stewards of the ocean focused on research and education. To learn more and get involved, visit mote.org.

Engage | Mindfulness Nature Walk

This activity will take you outside to walk in nature while practicing mindfulness. Mindfulness means noticing the world around you so that you can feel calmer and more relaxed. You may choose to visit the beach, a park, or just walk around the neighborhood where you live!



Let's get started!

While you are outside, think about these five questions:

- **What can you see?**
Look around. Do you see trees? Water? Plants? Animals?
- **What can you hear?**
Listen carefully with your ears. You may notice the breeze moving through the trees, birds singing, the sound of cars, people talking or other noises.
- **What can you feel?**
You might notice the sun warming your skin, the wind brushing past your body, or rain drops falling upon you. Does the ground feel hard or soft beneath your feet?
- **What can you smell?**
Breathe in deeply through your nose and see what you smell. Are you near salty water? Do you smell rain, cut grass or fresh air?
- **What can you taste?**
Breathe in deeply through your mouth. What does the air taste like?



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An Ornithologist is a scientist who studies birds. Ornithologists learn about birds in the following ways:

- Observing bird behavior
- Collecting data on dates and sightings of birds
- Following trends over time, such as:
 - When do birds migrate through?
 - When are they here “First of Season”?
 - Where are they spending their winter and/or summer?
 - Where are they nesting?



Ornithology skills you can try at home

- One of the best ways to become an amateur ornithologist is to get a pair of binoculars and go into your backyard and observe the birds that visit.
- To enhance the experience, set up a bird feeder with wild bird food you can purchase at the grocery store or feed store. Many of our backyard birds like black oil sunflower seed as well. (Be careful to set up your feeder so that squirrels won't eat all the bird food) Learn more here: allaboutbirds.org/news/where-to-put-your-bird-feeder/
- There is a super awesome website called Bird Academy by Cornell University that will introduce you to many activities you can do to learn about Ornithology: academy.allaboutbirds.org/learning-games/



- Try this! Audubon Adventures: a free family program offered at Felts Preserve the 2nd Saturday of the month by Around the Bend Nature Tours. You can find out how to join them here: aroundbend.com/audubon-adventures.html



Sarasota Audubon Society

Sarasota Audubon Society is a group of local bird lovers that share their knowledge with anyone who is interested in joining them. They are a local chapter of the National Audubon Society, dedicated to the protection, conservation and enjoyment of birds, wildlife and the environment here in sunny Sarasota, Florida.

Come visit us at the Celery Fields Nature Center! Learn more about Sarasota Audubon at our website: sarasotaudubon.org

Engage | Let's Plant for Birds, Butterflies, Bees and Bugs!



Let's plant for them everywhere—our front and back yards, our schoolyards, churchyards, condo, and apartment common areas, and our civic centers.

Why? Because they will come and hopefully stay—and multiply—if we plant Florida native plants. These plants are locally adapted and hardy. They thrive without irrigation, fertilizers, or pesticides. Florida native plants are the natural resting, nesting, cover, and food supply for our birds, butterflies, and bees. Supporting wildlife where we live, work and play adds to the enjoyment of our surroundings.

Let's get started!

Here's the nitty-gritty on creating a Wildlife-Friendly (and Climate-Friendly) Yard.

- **Kill the grass.** We recommend sun blocking methods such as covering it with cardboard and mulch or bags of commercial mulch laid end to end. When all sod is crispy dead, move mulch aside and plant into each opening.
- **Plant native species.** Google "Audubon, Plant Natives" to find a list of recommended species for your zip code.
- **Go fertilizer and pesticide-free.** Native Plants will thrive in the right place without them. Pesticides are indiscriminate poisoners.
- **Forget in ground irrigation systems.** In the right place, native plants, once established, will thrive on rainfall alone even during the driest months of the year.
- **Consider easy to grow, perennial natives.** These plants will thrive in pots on your lanai, in limited planting spaces, or in your garden: Firebush, Coral honeysuckle, Climbing aster, Spotted Bee Balm, Spiderwort, Lyreleaf Sage and Tropical Sage, Seaside or Slender Goldenrod, Starry Rosinweed, Sunshine Mimosa.
- **Get them in the ground.** Group species with similar light, soil and moisture requirements together. Determine how large each plant will grow so you can space each accordingly.
- **Mulch your newly planted areas** to cool the soil, retain moisture, inhibit weeds, and slowly release nutrients.
- **When to plant?** All year here in Southwest Florida.
- **The outcome?** First and foremost is knowing you are creating an outdoor haven for other creatures as well as yourself, family, friends and neighbors. All will be delighted by colorful butterflies wafting through yards and community spaces with birds providing the background music.

(Adapted from Audubon, Fall 2019 with Florida Native Plant Nursery additions)



Florida Native Plants Nursery

For over 30 years Florida Native Plants Nursery has grown and sold hardy native and Florida-friendly plants. We carry butterfly, hummingbird, and pollinator plants, trees and shrubs, edibles and herbs – all free from pesticides and synthetic chemicals. Learn more at floridanativeplants.com.

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Wildlife biologists are scientists that study wild animals in their natural environment! What a cool job! They observe animals and study where they live and what they do. This helps us understand more about them and how to help wildlife populations remain healthy. You can practice being a wildlife biologist by observing animals around you. Remember an animal can be a mammal, a bird, an insect or spider, an amphibian, reptile, or even a fish!



Supply List:

- Your eyeballs or a pair of binoculars (if you have them)
- Something to write with
- Something to write on
- Optional: a field guide or the internet to research and identify the animals you observe



Wildlife biologist skills you can try at home

Take notes or draw sketches of the animals you see. Pay attention to characteristics such as their size and shape, their color or patterns, where they live (habitat) and what they're doing (behavior).

Here are a few suggestions to get you started!

What does the animal look like?

- What size and shape is the animal?
- Does it have a beak? How big is the beak? What shape is the beak?
- Does it have a tail? Is it long or short? Fluffy or smooth?
- How many legs does the animal have?
- How long are the legs compared to the body?
- What color is the animal? Is it one color or lots of different colors?
- What covers the animal's skin? Is there fur? Feathers? Scales?
- Does it have a pattern or unique markings?

What was the animal doing?

- Where did you observe the animal; was it in a forest, at the beach, near water or on land?
- Was it alone or with a group?
- How does the animal move? Does it run or fly? Slither or swim?
- What does the animal eat? Does it have special adaptations that help it to eat or survive in other ways?



Backyard BioBlitz

You can extend this activity by doing a BioBlitz in your own backyard. A BioBlitz counts all the organisms in a certain area over a certain amount of time. You can pick any area of your backyard and spend 15-30 minutes counting everything you see on the ground, in the yard, and in the trees or sky above your area.

- Can you count how many different types of plants you find?
- How many different insects or spiders do you see?
- How many different birds?
- Are there any reptiles or amphibians around?
- What about mammals?

Keep going until you count everything! Nature is amazing and diverse!



University of Florida/IFAS Extension Sarasota County

UF/IFAS Extension Sarasota County is a partnership between Florida's land grant university (University of Florida), the USDA, and Sarasota County Government. The Florida Master Naturalist Program (FMNP) is an UF/IFAS Extension adult environmental education program. The FMNP promotes awareness, understanding, and respect of Florida's natural world among Florida's citizens and visitors. To learn more, visit sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/sarasota or call 941.861.9900. To learn more about the Florida Master Naturalist program, visit masternaturalist.ifas.ufl.edu. The UF/IFAS Sarasota office is located in Twin Lakes Park at 6700 Clark Road, Sarasota, FL 34241.



Nature photographers capture the extraordinary images that tell the story of our world. They travel the globe photographing exotic and endangered wildlife, stunning vistas, seasonal wonders, changing landscapes, celestial events, and great migrations. Unlike other photographers, nature photographers typically have little to no control over their subject matter—sometimes waiting hours in complete stillness to get the perfect shot.

Most nature photographers have a keen eye, a natural curiosity, patience, and a willingness to fully immerse themselves in their environment. Does this sound like you? If so, here are a few activities to start your adventures in nature photography! All you need is a camera (or the camera on a phone) and a little bit of nature!

Nature photographer skills you can try at home

- **Get a unique perspective:** Sometimes the nature you see every day looks totally different when viewed from a different angle. Try changing your perspective to see what new beauty you observe!
- **Sit and wait:** This doesn't sound like very much fun but sometimes patience is the name of the game. When you sit quiet and still, wildlife will gradually become used to your presence and start to show themselves. See what images you can capture by waiting for 5 minutes, 10 minutes, and 15 minutes. How long can you go? Would you make it in the arctic tundra waiting for a snowy owl or reindeer to meander past?
- **Get up close and personal:** Sure flowers are pretty but what do they look like when you're super close? What different patterns, colors, and textures can you see that you've never noticed before?
- **Go where the animals are:** The best way to photograph wildlife is to go where it is! Start somewhere you feel comfortable like a local park or trail. Never disturb the wildlife (or landscape) and always remember, safety first!
- **Timing is everything:** If there is a specific animal you want to see, research the best time of day to see it. Most wildlife is more active around sunrise and sunset. Seasons also have a major impact on what plants and animals will be out and about so be sure to take photos year-round!
- **Keep at it:** You might not have much luck with wildlife or feel like your photos are very good at first, but be patient and stay the course. Everyone has to start somewhere and you can only get better!



Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast

Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast protects land and water in Southwest Florida for the benefit of people and nature. Working with landowners, businesses, and government, Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast saves land forever, protecting those special natural lands that make this region extraordinary. Learn more at conservationfoundation.com.



Do you like spending time outside? Do you love trees and animals, exploring and growing things? Perhaps a career in forestry is the perfect job for you! A forester is someone who takes care of forests as they grow. Foresters do all kinds of different activities as they work to help the forest stay healthy. When a forest is healthy, it is stronger and will do better if attacked or impacted by disease, insects, storms, fires, or other natural (or man-made) disasters.

The best foresters tend to be very observant and investigative. They are curious about the world around them and the effects of different activities on the forests in their care. They often specialize in certain areas to harness their unique skills and expertise.



Forestry skills you can try at home

One of a forester's jobs is knowing how many trees are in the forest, what kinds of trees there are, and how well they are growing. The more a forester knows about the forest the better care they will be able to take of it. Grab your note taking supplies (paper and pencil) and visit a spot with lots of trees to put your forestry and data gathering skills to the test!

How many different types of trees do you see? Try drawing them in your notes!

- Can you identify the different types?
- What are the distinguishing characteristics of each type of tree?
- How many of each type of tree are there?
- Which trees are native and which are exotic?

Do any of the trees look different from the others of the same type?

- Sick or healthy? Young or old?
- If there are trees that look sick, make a note in your observations to check up on them in the future.

Take it to the next level by researching common tree problems for the type of tree you have identified. See if you can identify what the problem might be using your research and analytical skills!

What wildlife can you see in/around the trees?

- Do you see any nests in the tree?
- Is anything eating the tree or its leaves/fruit?
- What type of habitat does the tree provide for local wildlife?



Wild About Nature Committee

The Wild About Nature Committee is a group of Conservation Foundation volunteers working to connect kids with the wonders of nature. From planning and preparation to event execution, these dedicated individuals donate their time and expertise to make the Wild About Nature Festival a success year after year. To learn more about Conservation Foundation volunteer opportunities, visit conservationfoundation.com/volunteer.

Explore | Adventurer's Checklist

The best adventurers are prepared for almost anything. Here's a quick checklist and some tips for exploring families before you get out into the WILD!



Before you go

- **Put on sunscreen before you leave!** Sunscreen takes at least 20 minutes to work into the skin to protect it. If you put on sunscreen before packing your bag, by the time you leave, you'll be protected.
- **Get nourished and hydrated!** You won't have to pack as many snacks if you eat before you leave. Adventures are hard work, and you want your body to be working at max from the start.
- **Check the weather!**
- **Make a list of what you want to see.** It's fun to just go out to see what you can, but making a game out of what you think lives somewhere, and what you hope to see, can give you a sense of exploratory purpose!
- **Tell someone you're going out!** This is just in case something happens. You don't want a family member coming by while you're away and be worried when nobody knows where you are. It helps to write down where you're going, and how long you'll be away, then give it to a trustworthy neighbor, friend, or family member who isn't coming along.
- **Tie your shoes again!** You don't actually have to tie your shoes again. But do make sure all of your gear is secure, and that you're ready for anything!

What to bring

You may not need everything on this list, or you may need more things! Take what you think you may need, then a little bit more. For instance, you may not need a big backpack, or maybe only one person on your adventure team may need one.

- Walking shoes
- Weather-appropriate clothes (long sleeves if it's chilly, a raincoat if it's raining, etc.)
- A hat
- Sunglasses
- A sturdy backpack
- A first aid kit
- Cool snacks: Granola, snack bar, trail mix, jerky, fruit (remember: don't throw your fruit pieces into the forest! Bring out what you bring in.)
- Full water bottle
- Gloves (what if a tortoise needs help crossing the road, or you find some trash?)
- Plastic shopping bags (for the trash)
- Binoculars
- Notepad with at least 3 pencils (Why 3? Because one you can lose, and one you can give to someone if they need it, and there will still be one for you!)
- A bandana or towel



Challenges

Can you find a map of where you're going?

- Can you draw your own?

Can you find and talk to a ranger? Some questions they might like:

- How are you doing today?
- What's your favorite trail here?
- What's your favorite plant/animal around here?
- Is there anything super cool happening in the park right now?

Can you draw all the different kinds of trees you see on a walk?

- What's special about each kind?

What's the coolest thing you can find on the ground?

- You don't have to bring it home, but you never know what you may find when you look down.

How many bugs can you find?



Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast

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Explore | SEC Watershed Audio Tour

A watershed is an area of land where all the rainfall collects and flows downstream to particular body of water, like Manatee River or Sarasota Bay. When it rains, the water that hits our streets, rooftops and yards flows into storm drains, canals, or ditches and makes its way out into the bay. Unfortunately, this water can pick up a lot of pollution along the way. In order to keep our favorite downstream fishing spots, beaches, and waterways healthy, we need to take care of our upstream area too.



Take a tour

The Science and Environment Council Watershed Audio Tour explores the habitats, plants, and wildlife that make our area so unique and highlights the many ways we can better protect and enjoy these natural wonders. This free tour features 39 stops around Sarasota and Manatee counties that can be accessed by phone from anywhere. Explore them all from the comfort

of home or venture to each stop to receive an immersive 360° experience.

The Watershed Audio Tour explores topics around local sustainability, conservation, restoration, wildlife, ecosystems, water quality, and more. Call (941) 926-6813 and press any stop number 1-39. For a map with the full list of stops visit watershedtour.org

Choose your own adventure

Walk on the Wildlife Side

- Learn about the longest studied dolphin population in the world (Stop #34)
- Find out how much seagrass a manatee can eat in a day (Stop #22)
- Explore the nurseries of the sea (Stop #11)

Become a Watershed Hero

- Practice sustainable catch and release fishing (Stop #35)

- Protect birds by passing on plastic (Stop #39)
- Turn your home/yard into a rainwater cleaning machine (Stop # 7)

Let Us Tell You a Story

- The history behind the Celery Fields (Stop #1)
- Prehistoric life on the Manatee River (Stop #25)
- How citizens came together to protect the Sister Keys (Stop #23)



Science and Environment Council

The Science and Environment Council (SEC) of Southwest Florida is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit coalition of the 40 leading science-based environmental non-profit and government organizations in Sarasota and Manatee Counties. The SEC is a leader in Southwest Florida, convening discussions, informing policy, and enhancing public awareness about science-based conservation and sustainable practices to protect and restore our natural environment. To learn more about the Science and Environment Council visit scienceandenvironment.org

Your support of **Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast** ensures that land and water are protected for generations today, tomorrow and beyond. Be a champion for nature and the wild places you love. Join our conservation community today!



- Make a donation and support our ongoing work.
- Make a gift in honor of someone or to celebrate a special occasion.
- Join our Monthly Giving program and become a vital sustaining supporter of our work.
- Transfer a gift of stock.
- Make a planned gift and create your legacy for conservation.
- Become a Corporate Sponsor.
- Encourage your employer to give or match your gift.



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Visit our website at conservationfoundation.com and hover over "Support Us" for more details or contact Director of Philanthropy Lee Ann Rodriguez at leeann@conservationfoundation.com and 941.376.6787.



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Connect with Nature

Bay Preserve is free and open to the public, sunrise to sunset, every day of the week. The perfect spot for a picnic, a paddling excursion, a game of bocce with friends, and so much more!

Please note, the park does close occasionally for special events. To make sure the grounds will be open when you visit, check our calendar at conservationfoundation.com/calendar. To learn more about using the grounds for a private event, visit conservationfoundation.com/rental.



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on the shores of Little Sarasota Bay at beautiful Bay Preserve!



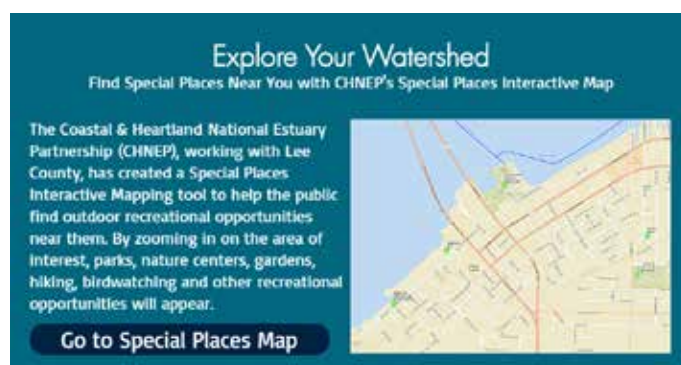
Explore | Special Places Interactive Map

The Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership (CHNEP), including Lee County government, has created a Special Places Interactive Map to help you find outdoor recreational opportunities nearby. You can explore your watershed by visiting these Special Places, which are areas for us to play in as well as habitat for Florida's wildlife. Watersheds are the area of land that drains into a downstream body of water, such as the Myakka and Peace River, these rivers then flow into Charlotte Harbor and out to the Gulf of Mexico. That means we ALL live in a watershed. Our exploration will start at the top of the Myakka River watershed and we will stop at a few special places on our way down the river while learning about clean water, healthy habitats, and the animals that depend on them.



Special places in the Myakka watershed

- **Myakka River Flatford Swamp Preserve:** Our first stop near headwaters of the Myakka River is Flatford swamp. A swamp is a wetland filled with trees. Healthy wetlands like swamps depend on receiving the right amount of water from the watershed. Hydrology, or the amount of water flows and levels is important for swamps. When oak trees in Flatford swamp historically received too much water in the winter from overdrainage in the area, they started to die. Water managers and farmers worked together to restore the hydrology (water flows and levels) to the correct amounts and the trees started coming back! Come see these beautiful oak trees make their return or read more about this area in CHNEP's Adventures in the Watershed.
- **Beker-Wingate State Park:** This State Park is home to gopher tortoises, Sherman's fox squirrel, and so many other unique Florida animals. The trails are fire breaks, which allow trained fire scientists to conduct controlled burns on the land that mimic Florida's natural fire cycle. These prescribed fires improve wildlife habitat by regenerating natural vegetation, allowing for an array of wildflowers to flourish in the park.
- **Myakka River State Park:** One of the oldest and largest parks in the area—over 26,000 acres. This park is in the river floodplain which means there are areas that are wet in the rainy season when the river expands and dry in the winter when there is less rain. This makes it an important place for endangered plants and animals because it has a variety of native habitats: wetlands, prairies, hammocks, and pinelands. You can explore it in many ways, by boating, fishing, canoeing and kayaking on Myakka Lake or the River itself or hiking and biking on the trails.



- Last stop on Myakka River:** Myakka State Forest is where the River flows into Charlotte Harbor. The forest is the historical home to a threatened species that only lives in Florida—the Florida scrub jay. Scrub jays live only in scrub oak and pine forests. These types of habitats are fire dependent - meaning they need trained fire scientists to conduct controlled burns on the land that mimic Florida’s natural fire cycle. These prescribed fires improve wildlife habitat by regenerating natural vegetation. Myakka State Forest contains over 40 miles of trail that are open to hiking, trail biking and equestrian activities and campsites along the Myakka River.

To plan your next adventure or find more special places in your watershed, go to chnep.org/explore-your-watershed/



Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership

The Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership (CHNEP) is a partnership of citizens, elected officials, resource managers, and commercial and recreational resource users who are working together to protect and restore water and other exceptional natural resources in ten counties, eight watersheds, and six estuaries in Central and Southwest Florida. To learn more, visit chnep.org, or contact Alex Horn at ahorn@chnep.org.

Explore | Sensory Scavenger Hunt



Florida State Parks are full of natural treasures. Use your senses of sight, hearing, smell and touch to discover the treasures in this park. Below are clues for treasures to find. Complete this activity by exploring the park and write what you discover. This activity can be done in several State Parks, so you may want to complete this scavenger hunt on a separate piece of paper for each park. Remember to never touch anything you are not sure is safe. Ask an adult for help first and always leave what you find where you found it.

Items to find

Use your sight to find:

- Something red
- Something older than you
- Something which does not belong

Use your hearing to listen for:

- A nature sound
- A human-made sound
- Something which flies



Use your nose to smell:

- Something in the air
- Something on the ground
- Something in bloom

Use your hands to feel:

- Something soft
- Something rough
- Something round



Oscar Scherer State Park

The Florida Park Service provides resource based recreation while preserving, interpreting and restoring natural and cultural resources. Oscar Scherer State Park offers 15 miles of hiking trails, 12 miles of biking trails, camping, birding, fishing, and more! To learn more, visit floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/oscar-scherer-state-park or friendsofoscarscherer.com or find us on Facebook @FriendsOfOscarSchererPark.



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Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast hosts a variety of events to help you connect with nature and engage with our work. From festivals to feasts, galas to small gatherings, art receptions to educational events, we offer something for everyone!



- *Feast Upon the Fields*
- *Wild About Nature Festival*
- *The Palm Ball*
- *Annual Conservation Reception*
- *Spring Nature Lecture*
- *Nature Explorers Youth Education*
- *Shakespeare in Nature*
- *Bourbon and Boots on the Bay*
- *Lunch and Learns*
- *Art Receptions*



Visit conservationfoundation.com/events to see what's coming up and how you can get involved!



Explore | Pollinator and Wildlife Plants Scavenger Hunt

Plants are primary food producers, supporting all forms of animal life on Earth, including pollinators, birds and other wildlife.

Can you find the plants shown here in our UF/IFAS Extension Sarasota County pollinator garden at Twin Lakes Park? Once you've found a plant, write its name on the space below the picture!

Depending on the time of year, some plants may not have flowers, seeds, or berries which are useful in plant identification. Using other characteristics such as leaf shape, leaf margins (e.g. serrated edges), and leaf texture (shiny/smooth) is useful when identifying plants.





After you find the plant names, use your powers of observation to identify which pollinators and wildlife these plants support. Are there certain plants that attract more creatures than others? On a separate piece of paper, take notes on what you observe. When you get home, look up the plants you have identified to learn more!



UF/IFAS Extension Sarasota County

UF/IFAS Extension Sarasota County is a partnership between Florida's land grant university (University of Florida), the USDA, and Sarasota County Government. Located at Twin Lakes Park, our office offers Sarasota residents, community education resources and volunteer opportunities in the areas of: 4-H youth development; agriculture; gardening and landscaping; natural resource conservation; nutrition and healthy living; and sustainability.

To learn more, visit sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/sarasota or call 941.861.9900. To learn more about the Master Gardener Program, visit gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/mastergardener. The UF/IFAS Sarasota office is located in Twin Lakes Park at 6700 Clark Road, Sarasota, FL 34241.

An Equal Opportunity Institution. UF/IFAS Extension, University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, Nick T. Place, dean for UF/IFAS Extension. Sarasota County prohibits discrimination in all services, programs or activities. View the complete policy at www.scgov.net/ADA.

Explore | Wrack Line Explorers

Let's explore wrack lines to discover clues about what lives underwater! Wrack lines are collections of natural and manmade things that are left behind by high tide. Wrack lines look like long lines of debris above the water's edge. You can find wrack lines along the shores of Sarasota Bay or on the beach. It helps to go looking for wrack lines at low tide, so take a look at a tide chart before you go!

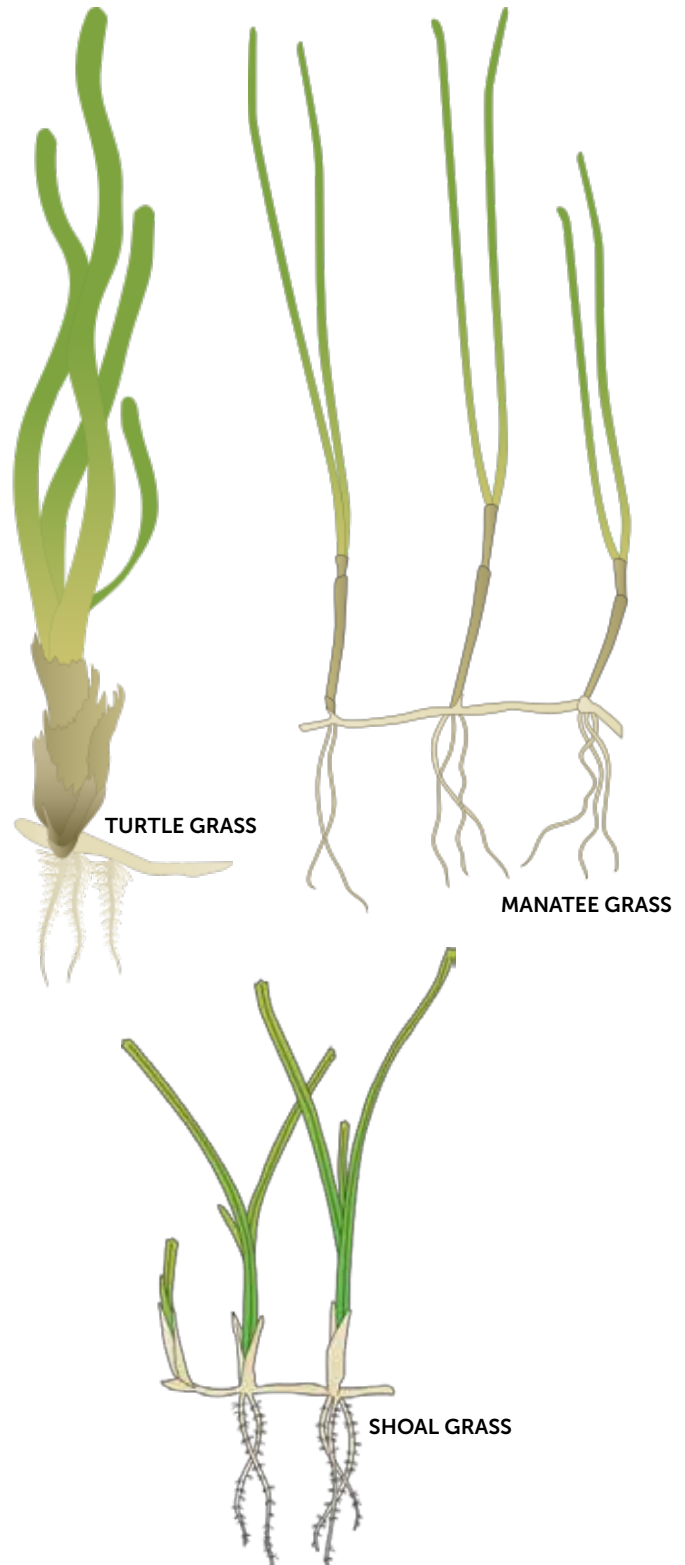
Let's get started!

Let's look for plants in the wrack line. Can you match any of them with the seagrass illustrations on this page? (Hint: manatee grass is roly-poly, just like a manatee. Turtle grass has long blades that look like ribbons. Shoal grass has shorter blades than manatee grass or turtle grass.) Seagrasses come from seagrass meadows, the marine ecosystems that carpet the bottom of Sarasota Bay. They are important for many kinds of wildlife, from crabs and shrimp to fish and birds, and even manatees and turtles!

Let's look for shells in the wrack line. Can you guess what kind of animals once lived in these shells?

Many different kinds of animals forage for food in the wrack line. **Can you find evidence of these foragers?** (Hint: look for feathers, claws, and other animal clues)

Sometimes there is trash in the wrack line that doesn't belong. If you find a piece of trash in the wrack, please pick it up and put it where it does belong—in the trash or recycling. Thanks for helping keep Sarasota Bay clean and safe for wildlife!



Sarasota Bay Estuary Program

The Sarasota Bay Estuary Program works to restore and protect bays from Anna Maria Island to Venice. To learn more, visit sarasotabay.org, call 941.955.8085, or email info@sarasotabay.org.

All illustrations Tracey Saxby, IAN Image Library (ian.umces.edu/imagelibrary/)

Explore | Photo Scavenger Hunt at Myakka River State Park



Bring your camera and visit the Canopy Walkway and Nature Trail for a fun-filled scavenger hunt. Taking pictures is a great way to collect memories without disturbing the park's landscape and inhabitants. Look for the signs along the nature trail loop to find clues to solve these riddles. This shady, 45-minute walk ending at a walkway through the treetops is a great adventure activity the whole family can enjoy!

✓ Items to find

How many of these can you find and photograph?

- A leaf from a plant that does not grow in a hammock
- A frog's water fountain growing in the hammock
- An animal's home
- A fern spore
- A boot from a tree
- A leaf from a tree that is not an oak
- An epiphyte
- Something an animal would use to build a nest
- Something that lives in a marsh
- Proof that an animal was here
- Something that doesn't belong in a hammock



How many of these questions can you answer?

- If it's not green, what color is a lichen?
- Many animals live in a hammock. Can you name three?
- Who dines on the dinner tree?
- What climbs up a tree but never climbs down?
- How is a palmetto frond different from a sabal palm frond?
- What hides in leaf litter on the ground but often climbs a tree?



Myakka River State Park

Myakka River State Park is one of Florida's largest and most diverse natural areas. The "Myakka Wild and Scenic River" flows through fifty-eight square miles of wetlands, prairies, hammocks and pinelands. To learn more, visit floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/myakka-river-state-park

All images taken by Park Volunteer Rosalie Coddington

Explore | Library Scavenger Hunt



Public Libraries are all about searching and discovery! Whether it's finding books on a plant you come across, streaming a documentary about animals, or using computers to find local parks and preserves, Sarasota County Libraries can help community members of any age.

Use this scavenger hunt to see the ways your public libraries can expand your world!

Start your scavenger hunt

- Apply for a library card! (Visit our website for all the options including a Digital Library Card)
- Bus, walk, bike, or drive to one of our library locations
- If you visit a library with a reading garden, go outside and take note of the insects, plants, and/or animals that call it home

★ **BONUS:** Ask for help finding a book about something you discovered.



- Ask about our Explore Your World Backpack
- ★ **BONUS:** Check it out and explore the world around you!
- Before, during, or after your trip, visit our website and click "Digital Library"
- ★ **BONUS:** Check out an eBook using CloudLibrary, Overdrive, or hoopla.
- ★ **BONUS:** Learn how to say your favorite animal in another language using Mango Languages
- ★ **BONUS:** Sign up for our Virtual Field Trip adventure through Beanstack.

Have a question or need help navigating this hunt? Ask Us! We library staff are ready to chat, text, and email (and of course, you can call)! Visit our website and click "Ask Us" to get started.



Sarasota County Libraries

Sarasota County Libraries provides equal access to information to foster lifelong learning. We have ten library locations across Sarasota County providing free events and services to enhance your roles within your local community. Visit scgov.net/library or call 861-1110 to find out more.



The Wild About Nature Field Guide to Fun would not exist without the support of our generous sponsors. We are grateful to each of these individuals, businesses, and organizations for helping connect children to the wonders of our world. On behalf of Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast, the Wild About Nature committee, and nature lovers everywhere, thank you!

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OUR VISION

The human and natural worlds of Southwest Florida flourish together.



Everyone is deeply connected to nature, respecting and balancing the needs and rights of nature and people.



The Florida panther and other wildlife, such as quail, Florida scrub jay, and gopher tortoise, roam freely through protected corridors and habitat.



Clean and plentiful water fills our lakes, rivers, and aquifers.



Sea life thrives throughout the Gulf waters.



All people experience the benefits of public open space equitably, through countless trails, parks, and preserves connecting and surrounding our communities.



Resilient communities withstand rising seas, temperatures, and storm intensities.

OUR MISSION

To protect the land and water of Southwest Florida for the benefit of people and nature.

Working with landowners, businesses, and government, Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast saves land forever, protecting those special natural lands that make this region extraordinary. A nationally accredited land trust, Conservation Foundation purchases natural areas, holds land conservation agreements and educates for responsible land and water stewardship in Manatee, Sarasota, Charlotte, Lee, and Collier Counties.

Visit our website to learn more and join with us.
Only by working together will our vision become a reality.



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