



## **Virtual Earth Day Celebration 2021**

### **Pause with Nature: Activities to Strengthen your Relationship with Nature**

In a world full of change and unknowns, we can find ourselves looking for inspiration and positive outlets. There is one thing that is constant and can heal us: nature. Nature is quiet and resilient and provides an opportunity for us to re-connect with ourselves and reflect on solutions during these challenging times. Connecting with nature, even for five minutes a day, can have tremendous benefits for your health and wellness while helping to reinforce positive new habits. Being in nature [reduces stress, blood pressure and stress hormones](#).

It's time to put yourself first - be intentional and carve out time in your day or week to dedicate to getting outside and trying something new. Building and maintaining a relationship with nature can have many positive impacts on our well-being. To start, try a hobby that you already enjoy (e.g. knitting, drawing, painting, etc.) on a deck, in a backyard or other outdoor spaces.

Read on for activity ideas that you can undertake in nature!

#### **Activity #1: Natural fabric dyeing**

[Read more – art therapy is about more than just art](#)

[NCC Nature Talks Webinar – Pause with Nature: Enhance your well-being with a dose of nature](#)





### **What you will need:**

- a large pot, a spoon, a stovetop
- 100% cotton fabric or clothing
- white vinegar
- avocados, yellow onions or black beans

### **Preparing your fabric or clothing**

1. Start by gathering white clothing or fabric that you'd like to dye. It is important that the clothing or fabric is 100% cotton.
2. Machine or hand wash your materials with hot water and detergent.
3. No need to dry the fabric, as the next step is to “mordant” the fabric — prepare it to absorb colour. There are several ways to do this, but I used the vinegar method.

### **Vinegar mordant method**

Add one-part white vinegar to three parts water in the largest pot you have and bring to a boil. Add fabric and fully submerge in the water. Let simmer with lid off for one hour. Remove and rinse under running water. Your fabric is now ready for the dye bath.

### **Making the dyes**

I have had the most success using avocado skins and pits (make a peach/pink colour), yellow onion skins (make yellow/orange colour) and black beans (make a purple/blue colour). If you don't have any of these, look for something in your kitchen or backyard that might produce colour. I have even used pine cones. Every time I make dyes, I get different results. Embrace the uncertainty!

### **Extracting dye from avocados**

Take three avocados and scoop out the green flesh. Take the skins and the pits and put them in a large pot with just enough water to cover them. Bring to a boil and reduce the heat to a simmer. Let simmer with lid off for one hour. Turn off the heat and let it cool. Strain out all the pieces so that you only have your liquid dye left in the pot.



### **Extracting dye from yellow onions**

Use three to five onions. Peel the onions, as you will only be using the skins. Add only the skins to a large pot, fill with enough water to cover. Bring to a boil, reduce heat to a simmer. Let simmer with lid off for one hour. Turn off the heat and let it cool. Strain out all of the pieces so that you only have liquid dye left in the pot.

### **Extracting dye from black beans**

Make sure you are using dry black beans, not canned. Pour dry beans into a pot or large bowl and add enough cold water to cover the beans. Let sit overnight or for at least eight hours. Strain the beans out.

### **Dyeing clothing or fabric**

Using your largest pot, add your dye and bring to a boil. Add your clothing or fabric, but wet it first if it is no longer wet from the previous step. Add a bit of water if needed to ensure the fabric is fully submerged. Reduce to a simmer with lid off for one hour, and let cool. Remove the fabric or clothing using gloves, rinse in cold water and hang to dry. Let the fabric or clothing fully dry, give it a day to set, and then machine wash on cold setting, and dry as you normally would.

Leaving clothing and fabrics in the dye bath for longer will give you deeper colours. I have learned that patience is all part of the process. Colours will be darker when wet and lighter when dry. Colours may fade a little after being washed. It takes some trial and error, so be kind to yourself and manage your expectations. This is meant to be fun, and there is no such thing as a failed art project.

## **Activity #2: Leaf printing**

Disclaimer: Only gather plants from your yard and don't pick ones that you are not familiar with. Be aware of plants that could pose a health hazard, such as poison ivy or giant hogweed.



### **What you will need**

- 100% cotton fabric
- white vinegar
- leaves and/or flowers
- a hammer
- a wooden cutting board or hard surface
- an iron

### **Preparing your fabric**

Similar to preparing fabric for dyeing, your fabric will need to be prepared for printing. For my prints, I use 100% cotton fabric. I found an old sheet that had been previously used as a painting drop cloth. I prepared it using the vinegar mordant method, and the prints have lasted really well, even after being washed and dried.



## Creating a print



After preparing your fabric using the mordant method, gather some leaves and flowers. Look for thin leaves and flat flowers, as these will leave the clearest print. Enjoy the gathering process, be gentle with the plants and only take what you need.

Lay down your first layer of fabric on the cutting board. Lay down an arrangement of leaves or flowers in any design you like on top of the fabric.

Lay down a second layer of fabric gently ovelap. Holding the fabric down with one hand, gently hammer around the edges of each leaf or flower. Continue hammering until you see the entire leaf or flower showing through. Once you can see the entire print showing through, gently separate the two layers of fabric. Hang both pieces of fabric to dry. Don't remove any bits of the leaf or flower that are stuck on the fabric, as they will peel off later once it has dried. The next day, you can peel or scratch off any leftover leaf bits or petals. To set your print, use an iron on cotton setting and press out your fabric. I lay a cloth on top first to protect the print.

Display your print by simply by hanging it somewhere or putting it in a picture frame!

## **Activity #3 - Take photos**

[Read more - expressive art therapy blog](#)

[NCC Nature Talks Webinar – Candid Canada: tips for capturing nature on camera](#)

One of the easiest activities to do outside is to take photos. Photo art therapy is the fastest and easiest way to be brought into the moment and save a piece of it. This can be done anywhere and is fast and easy. Anytime you are in nature and see something that catches your eye, snap a photo



of it. At the end of a month, make a collage of your photos. This can help ease you in to being more comfortable outdoors and taking time to appreciate the world around you.

#### **Activity #4 - Nature mandalas**

This activity is good for people of all ages and can be done on the ground or a table. [Mandalas](#) have been a spiritual practice for many cultures from all over the world, including the sand mandalas created by Buddhist monks. They use coloured sand to create incredibly elaborate round designs, sweeping them away once completed.

To create your own mandala, start in a yard, park, beach or field, collecting objects that catch your eye. Please ensure that you are only using materials found in your backyard, or an area that is not protected or sensitive. If possible, place the materials back when your activity is complete. Then, starting from the middle, arrange the materials in concentric circles. These can be made large and small, detailed or simple, and in pairs or alone. Try taking turns placing “rings” to see what you can create with a partner.

#### **Activity #5 - Watercolour landscapes**

Another activity that is great for all ages is small-scale watercolour landscapes. While sitting outside, try using watercolour paints on a postcard or smaller sized paper (thick and slightly textured is best) to capture something that you see; it can be as small as a single flower, or the whole scene. Watercolour is a really forgiving medium and suits the landscape style perfectly. Look often between your subject and your painting, and don't worry about capturing it exactly.

#### **Activity #6: Sit spot**

[Read more – blog about sit spots, yoga, guided meditation](#)

A sit spot is a favourite place in nature that you can visit regularly to relax, be present and give yourself the chance to reflect on the stressors in your life and ways to move forward. It is also the chance to observe patterns as you expand your senses and study patterns of local plants, birds, trees, animals, etc. What you see, hear and experience in nature can improve your mood in a moment.



To choose your sit spot, find a safe and comfortable spot outdoors that feels right to you. Mindfulness isn't about trying to forget about what is weighing heavily on you, but rather creating a space for those stressful feelings so that you can find the tools to help you work through them. Use nature as one of those tools.

### **Guiding ideas and questions for your sit spot**

These questions are only meant to be starting points. Feel free to let your mind wander, and write down other thoughts, ideas, observations, intentions and next steps. You can write down or draw whatever is meaningful to you in the moment, or you can just think in your head or talk out loud. Be honest with yourself — no one else will be reading this. It is only for you.

- 1) Sit or lay down, whatever feels most comfortable. Maybe do some gentle stretching if it feels right. Close your eyes and take at least five deep breaths.
- 2) Write or draw some of the plants or natural things that you see within an area encompassed by your outstretched arms, or the wildlife that you can see or hear, both near and far. Go through your senses — what do you see? What can you touch? What do you hear? What can you smell?
- 3) What do you find hard to describe? Is it how the wind or sun feels on your face, or how something you hear or see reminds you of something else. Maybe a question has popped into your head — maybe what something's role in nature is?
- 4) What is weighing heavily on your mind right now and why?
- 5) Set an intention for yourself, something that you would like to do for yourself or work on. Reflect on the obstacles that might be in your way and what you can do to overcome them.

### **Activity #7: Sound walks**

A sound walk is simply a walk that focuses on listening to the environment, no matter where you are. Sound ecology has become a field of study to understand how the audio environment affects different organisms. The complexity of sound can be separated into biophony (sounds of biological organisms), geophony (sounds of the physical landscape, such as wind or tumbling water) and anthrophony (sounds from humans or human constructs).

A sound walk requires nothing more than attention to sounds and a place to walk. If you are in a city, you can explore different areas (your favourite creek, busy downtown, your backyard, an open space) and notice what the sounds are and how they change as you move through the



environment. Take time to notice how different environments might reflect sound, or muffle sound, or sound like something entirely different than you'd expect.

During your walk, take time in different locations to stand in a safe place and close your eyes in order to listen more attentively. Our world is inundated with visual information, and humans tend to go for visual information first. By closing your eyes, your other senses become heightened. You could even walk with a friend on level ground and take turns leading each other so you can close your eyes and listen to how the sound environment changes as you move through it.

### **Activity #8: Yoga and meditation**

During these difficult times, it can be easy to feel disconnected from ourselves and others, so activities that invite us into union will ultimately help us feel connected. Doing yoga outdoors, sitting outside and listening to the birds chirp, or writing or journaling on your balcony are beneficial tools in establishing the sense of connection that we are craving right now.

#### **Steps to take your yoga or meditation practice outdoors:**

1. Find a spot that you feel comfortable and safe (such as your balcony, backyard, park, etc.), keeping social distancing in mind in public.
2. Set your intentions. Ask yourself, "Why am I doing this practice?" Having clear intentions will allow you to practise presently and be aware of the purpose of your practice. Your intention can be as simple as to notice your breath.
3. Lay your mat and any props down and start the practice with a grounding exercise. Feel your sit bones root into the earth and pull that grounding energy all the way up into the body. Breathe and notice your breath as it flows in and out, feeling present.
4. Finish your practice with a gratitude moment for Mother Earth and thank yourself for spending the time in a self-care ritual.