



NatureHood in your
Backyard
NatureBlitz DIY

How-to Guide for Educators

NatureHood in your Backyard

Topics Covered

- What is NatureHood?
 - Celebrate / Inspire / Promote Stewardship / Observe
 - NatureBlitzes bring all of these things together
 - What is a NatureBlitz?
- How can I (as an educator) do a NatureBlitz in my backyard?
 - Where do I do one? When do I do one?
- Why should I do one? What value does the activity provide to my students?
- With whom can I do a NatureBlitz? Where do I turn for expert help?

What is NatureHood?

NatureHood is a nature-based program that connects urban Canadians with *nearby* nature – nature found right where people live.

- NatureHood is built on four objectives: celebrating nature, inspiring people with nature, stewardship, and observing nature (e.g., citizen science programs).

NatureBlitzes cross-cut all of these objectives, making them superb educational tools. And they're quite easy to do, anywhere, anytime, by anyone.

- A NatureBlitz is like a bioblitz with a strong educational focus. It's a time-bound event in which citizen scientists (ie. the students!) try to identify and inventory as many different living things as possible in a given area.

HOW can I do a NatureBlitz in my backyard?

- **How:** It's easier than you think. Simply help the students observe nature in a section of your backyard.
- Observe all the different types of plants in the images of playing fields below.
 - Grasses vs. broad-leaved plants; some are in flower; different growth patterns; different sizes
 - What portion of the ground in a given area is covered by each type of plant?



How can I do a NatureBlitz in my backyard?

Do you have a playing field or a lawn your students can safely explore? There's lots of life to observe there! Look for insects moving within the grass, and take note of all the different types (species) of plants that actually make up a basic lawn.

THE KEY THING IS TO ADJUST YOUR SCALE OF OBSERVATION. LOOK CLOSELY!

LINK TO VIDEO

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13EmKOlN8vc&t=12s>

Suggested activities (optional)

- **ACTIVITY IDEA #1** - Set a challenge for your students to guess how many different plant species can be found on the lawn/field – then find out through observation!
- **ACTIVITY #2** - Use hula-hoops to define ‘sample areas’ and have the students compare numbers of plant species, % plant cover, number of insects, etc., between different sample areas around your schoolyard.
- **ACTIVITY #3** – Look closely for all the flowering plants in your schoolyard – not just dandelions. See how many different colours of flowers you can find. Compare and contrast the each flower and discuss why they might be different. Are the flowers only visible during certain periods? How might they be pollinated? Why might they differ?
- **ACTIVITY #4** – Talk about why the plants you find might be well-adapted to your schoolyard. Why might other plants find it hard to live there?
- **ACTIVITY #5** – Determine which plant species (and what percentage of the total) are invasive/non-native and discuss why that might be (hint: invasive species are typically much more better adapted to marginal and disturbed habitats and aren’t as susceptible to competition and herbivory as native species)
- **ACTIVITY #6** - Look for different types of birds overhead or in nearby shrubs, or on buildings. How many different types are there? Can you hear more types of birds than you can see? Are the birds using more than 1 type of habitat? What are they doing? Why?
- **ACTIVITY #7** – Compare your observations to the bird species observed at local birding hotspots using ebird.org - <http://ebird.org/ebird/places>. It’s free and easy to use!
- **ACTIVITY #8** – Look for different types of insects in the grass, on the ground, on buildings/structures or on trees/shrubs and other plants. How many different types of insects are there? Answer the same questions from Activity #6 but this time for insects. Check <http://ebutterfly.ca> and <http://www.butterfliesandmoths.org/> for moth and butterfly ID and information to further differentiate the activity.

How can I do a NatureBlitz in my schoolyard?

- There are lots of great online plant and animal ID tools – and many free APPS – that can easily be used your schoolyard:

PLANTS

- Evergreen’s Native Plant Database: <https://nativeplants.evergreen.ca/search/>
- CWF’s Native Plant Encyclopedia, “Quick Search”: <http://cwf-fcf.org/en/resources/encyclopedias/native-plant-encyclopedia/>

BIRDS

- Cornell’s Merlin Bird ID app: <http://merlin.allaboutbirds.org/>
- Cornell’s All About Birds website, “Browse by name and shape”: <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/browse.aspx>

INSECTS

- BugGuide.net’s “Clickable Guide” panel: <http://bugguide.net/node/view/15740>

MAMMALS

- Though antiquated, a valuable ID tool is McGill’s Canadian Biodiversity website: <http://canadianbiodiversity.mcgill.ca/english/species/mammals/>

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

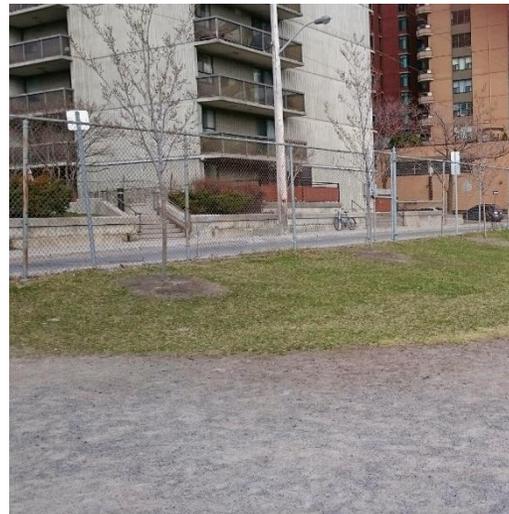
- Canadian Herpetological Society’s resources database: <http://www.canadianherpetology.ca/resources/products.html>

GENERAL WILDLIFE

- **iNaturalist.ca → A great, free app and website that uses global crowd-sourcing to ID any organism, anywhere. You can map your sightings and upload pictures. <https://www.inaturalist.org/pages/video+tutorials>**
- Encyclopedia of Life: <http://eol.org>
- Animal Diversity Web: <http://animaldiversity.org/>

WHERE can I do a NatureBlitz in my backyard?

- **Where:** Anywhere, regardless of how 'natural' your schoolyard is.
 - The images below are each 'natural' in some way – it's just a matter of scale and perspective.
 - Ask your students what creatures/wildlife the space might contain if it were more natural. What should be there? What's missing? Why? How are humans involved?
 - Even common species like pigeons, raccoons, gulls, grass and dandelions are examples of nature, i.e., prey species living in groups for safety; predators and scavengers foraging for food; species adapted to harsh environments; insect pollination and seed dispersal by wind



WHEN can I do a NatureBlitz in my backyard?

ALL YEAR ROUND.

- You can find birds – at least a 3 or 4 species – in and around most Canadian backyards throughout the year.
 - Between mid-December and mid-January you can include your bird sightings in a local Christmas Bird Count activity (<http://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/cbc/>)
 - In mid-February your sightings can be added to the Great Backyard Bird Count (<http://gbbc.birdcount.org/>)
 - May is when most of the migratory birds arrive back to Canada
- You can observe trees and shrubs, though dormant during the winter, throughout the year.
 - Look for signs of wildlife use, e.g., holes/cavities that birds, insects or small mammals could inhabit; signs of herbivory or insect damage; woodpecker holes; berries, seeds or cones on trees that could attract birds and other wildlife during the winter
- Look at patterns in snow or ice accumulation in your schoolyard. Why/how does snow pile up in certain areas and not others?
 - Are there any animal tracks in your schoolyard?
 - Which types of tracks – wild or domestic animals?

Why should I do a backyard NatureBlitz?

Value to students

- This activity provides an opportunity for students to engage with nature in their backyard and learn about urban wildlife and habitats.
- It helps promote and foster an appreciation for nature and hopefully encourage students to take what they learned home and explore nearby nature where they live

Value to parents

- You can tailor the NatureBlitz to any theme and focus on however many or few different types of organisms, habitats, human impacts/activities, natural processes, etc., as you like! You can meet one or more curriculum objectives and incorporate STEM learning
- **MOST IMPORTANTLY**, you don't have to leave your backyard and you can easily fit this activity into any block of time. Give your kids (and yourself) a whole new perspective on their backyard.

Where do I turn for expert help?

- There are probably several amateur naturalists, and maybe even some professional biologists or species experts, living in your local area or region.
- It's easy for you to connect with these natural history experts through the NatureHood program – simply contact the NatureHood partner organization in your province or region.
- Nature Saskatchewan www.naturesask.ca
- Nature Regina www.natureregina.ca
- Canadian Wildlife Federation <https://www.cwf-fcf.org/en/>
- Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation <https://swf.sk.ca/>
- Nature Conservancy of Canada <https://www.natureconservancy.ca/en/where-we-work/saskatchewan/>
- Friends of Wascana Marsh <https://www.wascanamarsh.ca/>
- Nature Canada <https://naturecanada.ca/>

Other activity ideas

- Look closely at the different types of flowers around your backyard.
 - Are the petals similar? Are the colours similar?
 - How are the leaves organized on the stem? Does the flower look complex or simple? Is it hardy or delicate to the touch?
 - Discuss what these differences might mean.



Other activity ideas

- Look for lichens on surfaces around your backyard (Try w/ fungi, too)
 - Are there many different types of lichens? What types of surfaces are they growing on? Which dominant colours do you observe on the top surface of the lichens? Are they evenly distributed around the schoolyard or on each surface?
 - Do the lichens have similar structure
 - Are they **foliose** or leaf-like? Are they **crustose** or like a hard-to-remove smear on the surface with tiny dots on top? Are they **fruticose** or stand up like little trees or dangle like threads?
 - Are there more of certain types of lichens in sheltered or high traffic areas?
 - Some lichens are sensitive to air pollution and may not grow near roads or residential areas.



Materials needed

- At minimum each kid (or team of kids) will need a species checklist and pencil to mark down what they saw

Click [HERE](#) for the NatureBlitz species checklist

OPTIONAL:

Field guides (borrowed from library) or “cheat sheets” of commonly found wildlife to help ID species

After the NatureBlitz

- Talk about what they saw – what was the coolest insect?
- Bring it home – what can students do at home to help foster a positive relationship with nature

- Social Media Contest
- Post pictures of your NatureBlitz datasheets or pictures of nature in your backyard or local park on
 - Nature Saskatchewan Facebook or Instagram page. Or tag us @NatureSask and @NatureCanada
 - You will be entered into a draw to win a Native seed package.



City Nature Challenge 2021

April 30 – May 3

City Nature Challenge

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yO45mO9BUJM>



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