
A Day In the Life of a Nature Connection Program For Individuals with Disabilities

Each time The Nature Connection arrives we bring new seasonal materials, new animals, and different hands-on activities.

Please see below to glimpse what happens at each visit, and a sample Seasonal Curriculum



Setting the stage

Every visit begins with the season, going outdoors to collect fresh materials. We use these to create a miniature natural habitat - turning the institutional setting into a wild landscape: a forest's edge, or even an ocean. We may open with a story that relates to the day's theme, or read a poem.



Immersion and joy

All participants - regardless of ability - are offered one-one-one opportunities to see, smell, or touch the natural materials. With help from our volunteers and staff even a person with severe physical limitations can trace the pattern of turtle's shell with their finger or feel the tickle of a hermit crab as it touches their palm.



Therapy animals - the stars of the show

Our therapy animals are always the main attraction. They bring joy, compassion and warmth, and participants are encouraged to touch or get close to the gentle creatures – doves, rabbits, chinchillas and hedgehogs.



Reaching clinical milestones

Nature is a universal language; developmentally disabled adults and children respond to animals and nature regardless of their abilities. Merely reaching out to touch an object may fulfill a clinical milestone.



Day's end

At the end of the hour-long program our habitat is packed away, and even our smallest therapy animals say good-bye for the journey home. On our next visit we will bring new seasonal materials, new stories to share, and new friends.

Sample Seasonal Curriculum

Note: These are brief sample programs for monthly groups. Each plan is customized to meet specific goals for participants and partner sites.

Month	Sample Activities	Natural Materials
September Abundance in the Garden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning about plants & vegetables • Touch and smell of fresh corn • Speak about value and impact of a community garden • Touch hard shell of snail, feathers of a chicken 	Chicken, Hedgehog, Snails, vegetables
October Pumpkins & Gourds!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore seeds: pumpkins and apples • Crunching sounds of dried leaves under feet or wheels • Experimenting with noise and quiet • Poem "October" by Joseph Pullman Porter. 	Rabbits, dried gourds, pumpkin; varieties of apples.
December Winding Down, Winter Solstice, Decomposition, Small Wonders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore tooth marks in plants, seeds and nuts • Observe snails one-on-one. • Discuss role that small animals, insects have in ecological web • Aromatherapy with essential oils 	Snails, ants, hermit crab; various seeds and nuts.
February Making Tracks! (*ideal after a fresh snow)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Porcupine tracking • Track-making with black paint on red paper – with rubber tracks • Smells of spring: witch hazel, daffodils, lilacs • Poem Burt Stevens, "Deer Tracks" 	Chinchilla; rabbit; dog; witch hazel