
A Day In the Life of a Nature Connection Elder Program

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

In designing a day's program we start 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 meadow, forest's edge, or even an ocean.



Beginning exploration

Our trained Program Coordinators may open with a story that relates to the day's theme, or read a poem. All elders are then offered one-one-one opportunities to see, smell, or touch the natural plants and materials.



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.



Rekindling long forgotten memories

The scent of fresh pine may open conversations about childhood memories of nature or memories of holiday traditions and family gatherings.



Sometimes our job is just to listen.

Elders who have been isolated by difficulty communicating or because of depression find nature to be stimulating and universal in its language.



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 Shedding Skins: New Beginnings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploration of milkweed and seeds • Discuss monarchs butterflies, migration • Review importance of each individual butterfly, short life cycle/long migration, and role in survival of species and habitats. • Study field guides and photographs of monarchs in Mexico winter resting grounds. Examine preserved or live butterflies. 	Monarch butterflies; milkweed tussock; caterpillars; Milkweed pods.
November Seeds Dispersing: Finding a place to thrive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss seeds leaving host plant and finding ideal "home" conditions where seeds—and we as individuals— can thrive. • Open a Pomegranate; sumac; burrs; break open a coconut • Learning about grains; Bread making and cooking as ritual. • May also discuss foods and traditions: how food creates, defines community 	Chinchilla, dog, gerbil. Seeds: sumac, sunflower; Nuts, acorns, chestnuts, Wheat stalks, rye stalks.
March Spring is Rising!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sap season - taste of real sap and maple syrup; optional demonstration: maple drilling. • Open and explore "the ugly" and beautiful - Skunk cabbage as example. • Discuss ways individual plants protect themselves such as witch hazel (now in bloom). 	Turtles. Witch hazel in bloom; maple logs for drilling demonstration; maple syrup; maple sap, maple blossoms.
May "Mandala: endings & new beginnings"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brief talk about Tibetan culture and religion, and how they make mandalas • Site staff and other adults may participate solo or collaboratively in mandala-making with natural materials • Story: Monks in Tibet and their mandalas. • Closing: poem by Jane Hirshfield, "Tree" 	Rabbit, hedgehog, chinchillas; Fresh flowers, leaves, seeds, shells, large mandala board.