



Nature Study

Each Friday morning, you will go through two of our nature cards. They are labeled in the upper right corner with the corresponding week. These are short, factual cards with images to help your child become familiar with objects in the natural world.

As you progress through our sessions, you may find it handy to keep your past nature cards in a binder for easy reference when your children come across a familiar object. These seeds you are planting will grow into a wonderful garden of knowledge for your children in years to come.

As you explore nature outside your home, watch and listen for newly discovered delights. Most of all, remember...

"Point to some lovely flower or gracious tree, not only as a beautiful work, but as a beautiful thought of God."

~ Charlotte Mason

Nature Study



Spruce 1

Pinus glabra

- Spruce is a member of the evergreen family. It is a straight-growing tree that grows between 65 and 130 feet tall
- It is found all over the northern hemisphere, especially in the southern United States and across Europe.

- The leaves are called "needles" and grow in bundles of two
- Spruces generally start to produce cones by age 10
- Spruces have a variety of uses, ranging from timber, to medicines, and of course, Christmas trees



Mistletoe 1

Viscum album

- Mistletoe is a parasitic plant that grows all around the world. It has smooth, oval, leaves and waxy, white berries that grow in clusters of two to six.
- There are 1500 species of mistletoe, varying widely in toxicity to humans

- The Romans associated mistletoe with peace, love and understanding and hung it over doorways to protect the household.
- In the Western world, mistletoe became associated with Christmas as a decoration under which lovers are expected to kiss. It was also used as protection to ward away witches and demons.



Poinsettia 2

Euphorbia pulcherrima

- Poinsettias are indigenous to Mexico and Central America and were first introduced to Europeans in 1834.
- The poinsettia is the world's most economically important potted plant.

- It was originally known as "Mexican flame flower" or "painted leaf." The name "poinsettia" was derived from Joel Roberts Poinsett, a botanist and the first US Minister to Mexico, who began sending poinsettias from Mexico back to his home in South Carolina.
- The star-shaped leaf pattern is said to symbolize the Star of Bethlehem, and the red color represents the blood sacrifice of Jesus's crucifixion. It was adopted by Franciscan friars in Mexico from the 17th century.



Amaryllis 2

Amaryllis belladonna

- Amaryllis is a bulbous plant, with each bulb being 2-4 inches in diameter.
- The name "amaryllis" comes from the Greek word "amarysso," meaning "to sparkle."

- The plant has a symbiotic relationship with carpenter bees, which are its main source of pollination, as well as different types of moths.
- The usual color is white with crimson veins, but pink or purple also occur naturally.
- The leaves are produced in the autumn or early spring in warm climates depending on the onset of rain and eventually die down by late spring.



Orange 3

Citrus × sinensis

- Oranges are a hybrid between two different species: pomelo (*Citrus maxima*) and mandarin (*Citrus reticulata*).
- The orange originated in a region encompassing Southern China, Northeast India, and Myanmar, and the earliest mention of the sweet orange was in Chinese literature in 314 BC.
- Brazil is the largest producer of orange juice in the world, followed by the United States
- As oranges are rich in vitamin C and do not spoil easily, during the Age of Discovery, many sailors would plant citrus trees along trade routes to prevent scurvy.
- Spanish travelers introduced the sweet orange into the American continent.



Fig 3

Ficus carica

- The fig is one of the first edible plants to be cultivated by humans.
- The common fig tree has been cultivated since ancient times and grows wild in dry and sunny locations with deep and fresh soil
- The plant tolerates seasonal drought, and the Middle Eastern and Mediterranean climates are especially suitable to it.
- People of the Italian diaspora who live in cold-winter climates have the practice of burying imported fig trees to overwinter them and protect the fruiting hard wood from cold.
- In the Biblical Book of Genesis, Adam and Eve clad themselves with fig leaves (Genesis 3:7) after eating the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Likewise, fig leaves, or depictions of fig leaves, have long been used to cover nude figures in painting and sculpture



Reindeer 4

Rangifer tarandus

- Male ("bulls") and female ("cows") reindeer can grow antlers annually, although the female antlers grow much smaller.
- Antlers begin to grow on male reindeer in March or April and on female reindeer in May or June. This process is called antlerogenesis.
- The color of the fur varies between season and subspecies. In the north, they are small and whiter. In the south, they are larger and darker.
- Their coats have two layers of fur: a dense woolly undercoat and longer-haired overcoat consisting of hollow, air-filled hairs.
- Reindeer hooves adapt to the season: in the summer, when the tundra is soft, the footpads become sponge-like and provide extra traction. In the winter, the pads shrink and tighten, exposing the rim of the hoof, which cuts into the ice and crusted snow to keep it from slipping.



Partridge 4

Perdix perdix

- The partridge is a rotund bird, brown-backed, with gray flanks and chest. The belly is white, usually marked with a large chestnut-brown horse-shoe mark in males, and also in many females.
- They have slightly fat, pear-shaped bellies that appear to give them great stability, so they are good little runners.
- They are a seed-eating species, but the young in particular take insects as an essential protein supply. During the first 10 days of life, the young can only digest insects. The parents lead their chicks to the edges of cereal fields, where they can forage for insects.
- In the Christmas carol, "The Twelve Days of Christmas," the first gift listed is "a partridge in a pear tree." Since partridges are unlikely to be seen in pear-trees (they are ground-nesting birds) it has been suggested that the text "a pear tree" is a corruption of the French "une perdrix" (a partridge).



Turtledove 5

Streptopelia turtur

- The turtledove is smaller and slighter in build than many other doves
- The turtle dove is a migratory species with a wide range covering most of Europe and the Middle East and including Turkey and north Africa
- It is a bird that prefers the open, rather than dense woodlands, and frequently feeds on the ground. It will occasionally nest in large gardens, but is usually extremely timid.
- European turtle doves are an emblem of devoted love.



European Robin 5

Erithacus rubecula

- Robins are relatively unafraid of people and are even drawn to human activities when it involves digging through soil, as they like to look for earthworms and other freshly turned up food.
- They are considered to be a gardener's friend, and since tradition associates the red breast with the blood of Christ, robins would never be harmed.
- A robin has an average life expectancy of 1.1 years; however, once past its first year, life expectancy increases. One robin has been recorded as reaching 19 years of age.
- According to an old British folk tale, when Jesus was dying on the cross, the robin flew to his side and sang to comfort him in his pain. The blood from his wounds stained the bird's breast and thereafter all robins carry the mark of Christ's blood upon them.



Frankincense 6

Boswellia

- Ancient Egyptians used frankincense as part of the embalming process
- The name comes from a French phrase "Fran encens" which means "high quality incense"
- It can block inflammatory molecules that can cause asthma
- Frankincense trees are tapped for their resin, which produces usable frankincense
- It has been used throughout history as a wound healer



Myrrh 6

Commiphora myrrha

- Myrrh is a gum-resin extracted from a number of small, thorny trees
- The resin is harvested by repeatedly wounding the trees to bleed the gum, which is waxy and coagulates quickly.
- The word "myrrh" corresponds with a common Semitic root "m-r-r" meaning "bitter."
- It is used as an antiseptic in mouthwashes, gargles, and toothpastes.
- In ancient times, myrrh had been used in Egypt for embalming the bodies of Pharaohs.
- Myrrh resin has been used throughout history as a perfume, incense, and medicine.