



# My nature connection

## NATURE SCAVENGER HUNT

GRADES: K+  
TIME: 40-50 MIN.

### Families will:

1. Explore a natural area near home.
2. Draw connections with the outdoors and gain more knowledge on species identification.

## ACTIVITY

### INTRODUCTION

This activity can ground you and your family in some of the ecology of the region where you live. There is a diverse mosaic of trees and wildlife in Minnesota.

Some species drop their leaves in the winter and are called **deciduous trees**.

Other species keep their leaves (which often appear as needles) through the winter. These are called **conifer trees**.

### ADAPTATIONS

All of these tree species have features that help them **adapt** to their environment. When deciduous trees drop its leaves and go “dormant” in the winter, this adaptation helps them survive cold temperatures. Other adaptations for deciduous trees, like the Bur Oak, include protective bark and large seeds in the shape of acorns.

### WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Scavenger hunt worksheet  
Pencil or pen  
Hard surface to write  
Outdoor clothing

Optional smart phone or app  
technology (iNaturalist app)

### SETTING

Outdoors: at a nearby park or in a backyard.  
Indoors: This can also take place from a window if space permits.

Can you point out a deciduous tree in the area?  
This could include oak, maple, birch, aspen, etc..

Conifer trees have thick and waxy needles that reduce water loss and help them endure the long winters in Minnesota. Other adaptations for species like the White Pine include using their cones to protect their seeds during harsh winters. Conifers never go dormant so they can use sunlight to create foods from carbon dioxide and water whenever they have enough light. This process is called **photosynthesize**. This adaptation gives them a better chance of surviving and reproducing.

Families have the opportunity to explore the characteristics that make the MN landscape so diverse and beautiful.

Can you spot a conifer tree in the area?

This could include red pine, white pine, balsam fir, cedar, etc...

Conifer trees are a little less common around the metro area than in northern MN, but can be spotted in some parks and yards.

Why do certain species thrive in other places and not in Minnesota?

Cacti and Palm trees have characteristics that make them suitable to survive in warm places like Arizona and Florida. Cacti like extremely dry and sunny conditions and palm trees love sunny and humid conditions. The trees that grow in Minnesota all enjoy balanced moisture with sunny and snowy seasons, semi-sandy soil and the diverse temperatures that Minnesota brings.

How do we identify these species?

Looking at the leaves, bark, and buds helps to narrow down the species. You just discussed a key part of identifying by looking at leaf characteristics. In the resources section at the end of this packet, are a couple of other leaves and characteristics to consider. Often times, naturalists will use another resource called a dichotomous key, or use the iNaturalist app.

### CONNECTING WITH QUESTIONS

What are a couple of things that you learned about yourself while exploring?

Adults, where did you like to explore when you were younger.

### SCAVENGER HUNT

In this activity, families have the opportunity to discover some of the trees described in the introduction, as well as look for wildlife and use different senses to explore the characteristics that make the MN landscape so diverse and beautiful. There are ten questions in the scavenger hunt below. Each question can be answered without using the iNaturalist app, but exploring the app can help identify the plants and animals that your family discovers. Below is a "how to" guide for using iNaturalist.

If you'd like to opt-out of using technology, some libraries offer plant and wildlife species keying books.

Family members can also guess the species they think it might be, or make up their own names for them as additional options.

## IDENTIFYING PLANTS WITH iNATURALIST

iNaturalist is a Smartphone app and website that can be used to identify known and unknown plant and wildlife species. Simply take a photo of a plant or animal that you are curious about and iNaturalist will use your location and picture to help identify what you snapped.

### USING A SMARTPHONE OR DEVICE:

Download the app & create a log-in username and password

Explore the app or click "observe"

Take a photo

Tap "What did you see?" and view the app suggestions

Scroll through the options

If unsure, click the "i" for info to give you clues.

If the plant is native, it will show up in the area on the map where you took your picture.

If the plant is non-native to your area, use the characteristics and photo to determine what you think it is.

Click share!

When posting pictures, different people on iNaturalist can see them and either confirm the species you decided upon, or suggest another one.

Find out if another iNaturalist confirmed your species I.D. by tapping "me" in the lower bar and your plant name.

### USING A COMPUTER:

Go to <https://www.inaturalist.org> and create an account

Click "Add Observations" on the right side of the screen

As you take photos, upload them to iNaturalist

Once the photo is uploaded, click "species name" and suggestions will appear

To learn more about the suggestion, click "view"

Click the species that fits yours best!

# COMMON LEAVES AT CAMP FIRE



ELM



SUGAR MAPLE



TAMARACK



SPRUCE



ASH



WHITE OAK

## TELL US WHAT YOU THINK!

take a short survey at: [campfiremn.org/mynatureconnection](https://campfiremn.org/mynatureconnection)

or here: Kids Survey - [click here](#) | Teachers/Parents Survey - [click here](#)

## SCAVENGER HUNT

1. A sign that the seasons are changing

What season is on its way? \_\_\_\_\_

2. A conifer tree (Think needles!)

Can you identify it? \_\_\_\_\_

3. A deciduous tree (Think leaves!)

Can you identify it? \_\_\_\_\_

4. A seed from a plant. (Think about the tree seeds we talk about earlier)

What kind of seed is it? \_\_\_\_\_

5. An animal sound

Can you find the animal and identify it? \_\_\_\_\_

6. A dead piece of wood/log

Is anything living in it? \_\_\_\_\_

7. A plant that you think smells really good

Can you identify it? \_\_\_\_\_

8. Something flying through the air

What is it? \_\_\_\_\_

9. Your favorite cloud

What is it shaped like? \_\_\_\_\_

10. Your favorite tree in the area

Can you identify it? \_\_\_\_\_

