

curriculum)...to booklets...to complete books...to research papers...to articles for publication. Certainly, ideas are endless!

Nature Studies are also a perfect way to prepare children for research. Most college programs center around research. My husband's grades in college were anywhere from 80-100% based on his grade given for his research papers. Children cannot be prepared for this kind of study by the mere workbooks and textbook studies that are so common in most curriculums available. This is where nature studies can really prepare children for any area of life...even college!

Simple nature studies usually require that the children look up names and information about the specimen or the topic. Their habit of recording that data is the perfect preparation for further research! Not to mention, as the children develop their notebooks, they eventually find that there are areas of interest that they want to pursue further than simple recording. Usually these are the areas that children begin to immerse themselves into. The process usually includes lots of reading... thinking... asking questions... looking up the answers for those questions... more reading... recording details found... more questions... going to others in that field of study... finding their own "niche" in the field of interest... sharing what they have come to love! Children who pursue their studies in this manner become great writers at young ages. They have a purpose for learning. They are equipped to learn and share their knowledge "their own way."

How can a mom help develop this gift of writing? This will seem very simple, but developing a writer is a simple, easy process! First, *encourage your child to read widely*. Readers are great writers. They have much to share. Reading keeps them filled up with fresh ideas. Reading also gives them great models to copy. They can be inspired to share ideas like a particular author does. They can be inspired to use words to convey the deep thoughts of their heart. Reading is an indispensable part of writing!

Another way is to *require that they write every day*. They will not write every day for their nature studies (unless nature studies happen to be "their" area of delight). But nature studies give the child more options to include in their writing, and more life experiences to think upon and hopefully write about now or later. The best way to develop young writers is to establish a habit each day of writing. They can use many areas of their

normal life to establish this habit from copying their favorite Scripture, poems, quotes, hymns...writing narrations about books they read or places that they go or things they observe... developing notebooks for their areas of study...making their own scrapbooks...writing metaphors/parables...working on research projects/papers...writing essays...and even writing articles for publication. These projects are not for just any topic, but for those topics that the child is naturally drawn to.

One other way to encourage your children to write is to treat them as a *real writer!* I know, you are wondering what on earth that means. Well, real writers have to take time to learn about their topics. Our children need that more than a professional writer does! Professional writers also have to have help in editing their work. They do not write something without lots of brainstorming...outlining...writes...and rewrites! Our children need this same process if they are to write anything of depth. Encourage this as they write. Encourage real writing projects such as letters to the editor, articles, books, notebooks, and email. They will quickly see "their" importance as a writer and the importance of learning more in all areas of study!

Find Ways to Help Them Find "Their" Field of Study!

Where are we going? There is one thing that concerns me with our culture today. In most cultures around the world, children are brought to maturity at an early age. In our own country, children entered the adult world around the ages of 12-13 until just the last 150 years. In our culture today, we find it rare for an adult to feel certain that they are in their particular calling! What has gone amiss?

I believe that it is education as it is today. Education in the past equipped children with the basic skills needed for them to learn. That education only takes about 100 hours, yet our schools today are dragging out education for 12 years...and even into college and more college with graduate school...all of this education without teaching the children skills to live and learn on their own. Sure some can read and write on a line and do basic computation, but what I am meaning here is real education—self-education for life!

The best way to remedy this is to give children the basic skills needed to learn, then put them in touch with real people and real life! It is through real people and real life that we receive ideas that feed our mind...that we learn the basic skills...yes, that we are challenged to grow in our life purpose!

The real classroom for the child is the classroom of others. That may be through books, places, or one-on-one relationships—but it is the best classroom! In the older years this does not change, rather it deepens. The children need exposure to those experts in fields of their interests, whether those interests are in the field of nature study/science or some other field of study.

We have already begun to set up apprenticeships and internships with others for our children. They have had "days" helping them in their business or profession. This has been a wonderful experience for our children, but it has blessed those we have tapped into as well. I don't think that they realized how much they had to offer others just by teaching "who they are" to others. This was a good thing for all involved.

This also helps to prepare the children for their life purpose. They learn skills that help them now and later. They develop a firm vision of their own "niche" that only they can fill. They see how to start at the bottom and work their way up. They also see benefits and drawbacks to different professions.

What do you do to help them in this area? Help them to read widely, soak up information everywhere they go, and get to know lots of people from a wide variety of backgrounds. As you see an interest develop in their lives, put them in touch with those who are excellent in that area. You may first want to work alongside with them. While this is crucial in the early years, this is not as necessary as they grow more and more independent. There may be a need at times for you to help them get into an area of interest. Much too soon time comes when they are able to go out on their own to develop opportunities.

Just last year my son was able to help as a counselor for Cub Scout Camp. He set it all up himself. I went with him to the organizational meetings, but he was fine for me to leave each day while he worked. In fact, he was not only a helper for a den of boys, he was their leader for every day of camp.

This gave him confidence to go to a local bookstore (after he finished his book on Marines) to set up his own book signing and arrangements for putting his book in the store! I was proud and teary as I saw some of the first fruits of real education in our home. Now, he is pursuing other fields of interest. Some are fleeting studies. Some look as though they are building up to his calling. All are shaping his life to conform him into a vessel that God can use!

What Do You Think?

Teaching older children is not much different from teaching our little babies. It requires that we get to know these children...really know them! It requires that we relax and give them back to God...the One Who can teach us which way to go step-by-step. All we have to do is to enjoy our children during these years. They are not any different from us. They need to know how to learn, how to work hard, how to serve others, how to enjoy work, how to know God's will for their lives, and how to give their lives completely for the God they love. We can teach them much of this as we simply get out in God's creation! When we think of these eternal lessons, all the sudden we find that nature studies are beneficial...even for the older student!



101+ EASY Ideas for Nature Studies... Just to Get You Going!

If there were one person who really "could" and "should" write a book entitled *Nature Study for Dummies* or an *Idiots Guide to Nature Study*, it would be me! Being a 100% city girl who "gagged" every time that we passed the stockyard on our way to school, you would be proud to see how far I have come!

Perhaps, it was slowing down to get in direct contact with the things that frightened (or gagged) me. Perhaps, it was seeing things through the eyes of my children—with delight, deep curiosity, and intrigue! Perhaps, it was marrying a guy (country bumpkin!) who actually raised wild critters and spent years out in nature hunting with his father and helping in the family bee business. Yes, it may have taken 15 years, but finally I am able to look along the highway and name nature! You see, you *can* teach an old dog new tricks!

This section of the book includes ideas that prayerfully will help you no matter where you live, the season you are in, or the resources you have on hand. Even if you do *one thing* a year, you will become more familiar and in love with God's creation. Have fun!

Plan an Outing...

Find a spot to observe Nature that all of your family will enjoy...your neighborhood, a biking trail, zoo, botanical garden, a canyon, a mountain trail, the local park, the river, planetarium, aquarium, wild life refuge, arboretum, vacation spot, living history museum, a friend's neighborhood, Grandma's back yard... Just start small. You can start with your own yard, a local park, an arboretum, hiking trails, or vacation spots. The public places usually have a hiking map or have the trees marked so there is no guesswork for novices! Don't forget to always ask for any teacher lesson plans wherever you go. Our local aquarium gives wonderful handouts with coloring sheets, information pages galore, and actual study lessons just for the asking! We

also acquired fantastic booklets, books, posters, and information pages from local, state, and federal agencies. They are thrilled by the interest and will even tell you about or take you to wonderful trails or sites in your area! The foresters are always looking for little helpers to go plant trees or help with their projects! All of these are wonderful outlets but it is just as fun to start in your own yard because there are millions of treasures there just for the noticing!

Get Outside! Go for a Nature Walk!

" The children walk every day; they are never out less than an hour when the weather is suitable." Charlotte Mason, *Home Education*, page 29.

The easiest way to teach nature is to be outside in nature! Children need long hours of play and observation of nature. Mom can take a quilt outside for the afternoon—work on a project or read a book. She is just within view and earshot for the little ones to run and explore and then bring back "tellings" about what they see or even little goodies to show her!

At least once a week, the whole family can go for a nature walk. They need not be a fancy "hike" or a planned lesson time—just time out together enjoying nature's bounties. Goodies can be taken home to look up so that the children can learn "names" and more information about their new friends. Occasionally you may want to take a walk with your grandparents or parents or a naturalist. They can share wonderful information with your children and YOU!

Look for Lessons During Your Nature Walk!

The lessons occur naturally along the way. All that is needed is to take time to *observe* God's creation! Take a look at...

The dawning of the day or the sunset...How many different colors do you see? How does each day differ?

Night sky...Is it starry...moonlit?
What makes the winter sky different from the summer sky?

The birds...Are they skittish or bold?

Are they big or small? What makes their look distinctive?
Listen for their songs! Look for their different nests!
Watch their feeding habits!

Flowers... Take a close look at the different parts of the flowers.
Why do some have thorns and others do not? Look for blossoms on trees...
When do they blossom?

Insects... Listen for their sounds.
Watch them work!

Sun... Watch the positions of the sun...
Can you tell the time by the sun?

Trees... Notice trees in all the different seasons.
Learn to recognize the different trees by their bark...
flowers, leaves, needles, shapes, and seeds!

Take note of...
Rocks and minerals...pond life...temperature changes...
mushrooms...sounds...plant life (like ferns, herbs)...
animal tracks...any wild animals!

Keep a List of the Attributes of God...

Want to know God? One of my favorite quiet time projects has been to keep a list of the names of God and the different attributes that He teaches us about Himself! This would be a great addition to your nature notebook!

Paint!

When my children were little, they loved taking the easel outside to paint. They would paint flowers and trees and sometimes one another! Fun, fun, fun!

Snow Ice-cream...

Stuck inside? Want some fun? Make ice-cream! You will need 1 cup of milk, 1 teaspoon of vanilla, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sugar...beat until frothy. Place into a large bowl and add enough clean, fresh snow until the liquid is completely absorbed by the snow.

Sketch and Label...

Want an easy lesson for your children? Sketch and label! They may choose anything from insects to trees to animals to flowers...so on! All you need is to go to the non-fiction section of your library and get a book with the parts labeled for you. Let the children sketch and label. They may want to watch for the life cycle of the animal, plant or tree. There are constant changes that are fun to note! If you want a great resource at home, get a copy of *The Handbook of Nature Study* by Anna Comstock. (currently available through Rushton Family Ministries!) Dover Books also have wonderful illustrations to use!

Develop a Nature Notebook...

This need not be difficult. We struggled for years with the desire to have beautiful sketchbooks like Edith Holden's *A Country Diary of an Edwardian Lady*. Finally, we decided to just keep a notebook that is much like a cross between a scrapbook and our copybooks. (Look in the chapter *How-to's For Easy Nature Notebooks* for more details on how we have decided to do ours!)

Start a Collection...

Collections teach much informally. They teach how to organize, label, display, and date materials gathered. This is a natural project that you will find the children doing on their own. Your collections can be of anything. You may like to collect rocks, leaves, butterflies, flowers, pictures of the sunset or sunrise, feathers, nature poetry—the list is unlimited! You can also swap or sell extras from your collection to friends or family long distance. Remember, they may not have the same treasures in their back yard that you have. What a treat to get jewels through the mail!

I-spy!

Want to keep your little ones busy? Give them a magnifying glass or microscope or a pair of binoculars. They will love spying on the little critters! They can just spend their time observing things up close or they can sketch what they see into their Notebook or they can write narrations about the intricate details that they observe. Another alternative is to use a telescope.

Movie Night...

Usually we try to have a movie night when my husband is off or when he is working on Saturday nights. We love the Discovery Channel, PBS, movies, nature series which all teach neat facts in a fun way! We also love *Anne of Green Gables*, *Anne of Avonlea*, *Where the Red Fern Grows*, *Summer of the Monkeys*...as neat family films. These are musts for our family every so often!

Going on a Rock Hunt...

Rocks, minerals, fossils and other geological specimens can be found all over! Hunt for some of your own treasures at excavation sites, riverbanks with steep sides, highway cuts, along the roadside, in stream-beds, on river banks, on hillside ledges, so on. If you want to bring some home, carry newspaper to wrap samples in, notebook/pencil, magnifying glass, heavy gloves, a rock hound's pick and chisel, safety glasses or goggles, rock pouches, a guide on rocks and minerals, and of course, a backpack to carry it all in! ☺

Collect Postage Stamps...

A while back Elisabeth decided to begin a project. She decided to collect interesting stamps from my mail that comes in for our ministry. She cuts out the entire postmark and stamp, glues it onto paper, and keeps it in her notebook. The most gorgeous seem to come from foreign countries. Many of them have a nature theme. You can purchase beautiful stamps with a nature theme as well. An alternative is to swap postcards with long distance pen-pals.

Join a Nature Club!

Speaking of pals—it is so much fun to join others in studying of nature. My friend Mary began a monthly nature club in our area this past year. It has been such a treat! She has brought us to the same area every month to look at the area as it changes. Some months we have changed our “scenery” to visit a hiking trail or backyard of others, like grandparents! ☺ Mary has been the perfect organizer of our group. She keeps things simple by doing just what she does naturally. She keeps the children outside—keeps the house clean and simplifies her commitment. She takes the children for a walk teaching them new facts as they go along, encouraging them to sketch or gather specimens to carry home for further study and identification. You could do this too even if you just get together with one other family. This really encourages those who are less gifted in the area of science. (like me!) It also gives the children a forum to share what they are learning in their studies, experiments, research, so on!

How to Choose a Resource IF You Can ONLY Have ONE...

“Financially challenged???” That is what Harold would call us! Ha! If you find yourself not knowing exactly where to begin on resource guides, try to pick *one* Audubon (or your favorite) guide on the first topic you would like to explore. My personal first was *Trees*. It was easier for me to press leaves and study trees than any other area (especially Matthew’s first-Reptiles!). EEK! We add to our collection from time to time. There are still many that we have not bought because we can have access to them any time at our local library.

Ride Bikes...

There are some of the most beautiful biking trails in North Alabama! They are nicely wooded so you stay cool for the most part—unless you are as out of shape as I am! ☺ Most of ours are paved and very well used. This is one way to get fresh air, exercise, and a quick lesson out in nature all while building sweet memories!

Set Up a Seasonal Table...

There are some great ideas in *Victorian Family Celebrations* by Sarah Ban Breathnach. (This book is a MUST for nourishing Mom!!!) For your seasonal table, just set up a table or a shelf in your home. Set out a display of treasures found outside throughout the various seasons...books that are favored read alouds each year during that particular season...or special crafts made especially during that season. Decorate the table in different colors to go along with the seasons. Let this be a project for the children to keep up throughout the year.

Name Nature!

"Familiarity brings intimacy."
Mary Blocksma, *Naming Nature*

When I say that I could and should call this book *Nature Study for Dummies*, I really am not kidding! A few years ago, Harold and I were talking. I was so excited to begin a study about trees. He asked me which trees I would begin with—I should have known he was up to something here. I replied that I would start with the most common (this was in Mississippi)--the Pine Tree. He then asked which kind? I was stunned! I had no idea that there was more than one type of PINE TREE, but there are countless varieties! ☺

It was at this time that I decided that I would begin to work on my nature aptitude. I set a goal to learn the names of at least one new thing every month. How did it go? Well, I was riding the motorcycle the other day when tears began to stream down my face. I had realized that I *actually* knew the names of all the wildflowers that I was seeing! I remembered them from last year! This meant so much to me because only I could know how much I longed to know the names of all my dear friends!

I am taking it this easy and finding that I am learning more and more each and every day! This is a neat way for our children to learn about nature too. Just think, nature study really can be this easy!

Season Book...

There are so many changes throughout the seasons. You may find that your children find so many changes with the seasons that they can develop a notebook or book just on the topic of seasons. The ideas for these are limitless from keeping lists, pictures, sketches, or journal entries about the changes of each season.

Get Your Supplies Ready...

Keep a nature basket/bag/backpack ready to go. You can find one reasonable at a department store or even second-hand. Essentials are your nature notebooks... field guides... paints... pencils... camera... magnifying glass... containers for specimens... and oh, snacks!

Watch Bumblebees...

Busy as a bee? Well, take time to watch some bees. It will do a lot for your mind while teaching wonderful lessons about nature! Take a nice, thick quilt and a great book to a big field. It won't be long after you settle down to read that you will find some of those busy bees buzzing around in their carefree manner!

Watch the Clouds...

No bees? Well, take an Audobon Weather Guide with you and try to name the clouds that you see. Ask the children to figure out what kind of weather you can expect?

Accumulate Science Kits...

There are many great kits that are available to help children understand the concepts about science that are often hard to explain. We have found some of the best kits at Sam's Warehouse for very reasonable prices. We just keep ours in our "games bin" for our children to play as they are interested!

State History...

One really fun and interesting project that teaches nature study *and* state history is to research and study in depth about the State bird, State flower, State water fowl, State tree...so on. The children could compile their information into a booklet or just keep it in their nature notebooks. For more help, contact your state capitol or Department of Archives. Ours is online in Alabama with lots of wonderful information!

Tree Study...

Trees are easy to begin with. Pick a tree and sketch the tree, its leaves, its bark, its buds, and its blooms into your sketchbook. If you are like me and not so good at sketching, just take a picture! In your notebook add special details like the date, where you found it, common name and Latin name for the tree, and a description of the tree. You may want to describe the branches, bark, birds/insects living in the tree, approximate height, and the purpose of the tree!

One fun way to get to *know* about a specific tree is to "adopt a tree" for the year. Sketch it each season. Paint in watercolor. For the "artistically challenged" nature lover, take a picture each season. Note any animals making it their home. Record observations about them. Measure the tree. Make rubbings of its bark, leaves or blossoms. Collect and press its leaves and blossoms. Keep all details in your nature notebook or a specific scrapbook or book just about your tree!

Begin Your Own Nature Resource Library...

When we began to homeschool, we had a very poor home library. In just the last eight years our library has grown 100 fold. Now we have several different libraries throughout our home. We have found some wonderful resources through the years that really help us with our nature studies while saving us a lot of time and money from having to go to the library to find out information! We have many of them listed in the back of this book under the Resources Section. We use lots of field guides, nonfiction books, picture books, nature storybooks, and nature diaries. Most of our favorites have been found second hand at library book-sales or homeschool curriculum fairs. If you are in deep need of help but limited on your money and library

at this point, don't forget to use the Internet as your helper. It won't take long until you will have the resources that will be your beloved teachers along the way.

Setup an Indoor Terrarium or Aquarium...

Pets in a Jar By Seymour Simon has lots of ideas for how to set up a home and care for special pets such as Hydras, Planarians, Pond Snails, Water Bugs, Tadpoles, Newts, Toads, Earthworms, Ants, Crickets, Praying Mantles, Butterflies, Moths, Brine Shrimp, Hermit Crabs, and Starfish. You can find it at your local library. We currently have a caterpillar and two Bumble Bees in captivity. These critters are so neat to watch that you hardly know you are learning.

Definitions...

You may want to teach research skills (and character!) informally by asking your children occasionally to look up definitions to nature and science terms from their copywork or reading—I stress occasionally! We use a children's dictionary for many definitions. However, we find that many words are just not defined properly or fully. For this reason, we primarily use the *Noah Webster's 1828 Dictionary* for all Bible Study and writing. (The *Noah Webster's 1828 Dictionary* is available online at <http://www.christiantech.com>) My son has just begun to copy definitions and research using it. Elisabeth still uses the children's dictionary, mostly because the print is so small. I use it primarily in my writing and personal Bible Study. An older child will love to research using it!

Take a Closer Look!

What marvels await in the little critters! Hunt up a bee hive... ant hill... bird's nest. Spend time watching their ways and manners. Draw or describe what you see!

Make a Creation Mural or Creation Book!

We have studied *Genesis* through every year since my little ones first began homeschooling. They never get tired of the story of Creation. We have done many wonderful projects to help them learn the days of creation. The children have drawn pictures each day as I read aloud the passage.

They have taken newsprint that we were given by the roll from our local newspaper and rolled out huge sheets to decorate as a mural timeline of creation. They have made little booklets with copied selections of the passage with illustrations. This is a fun and easy way to help them remember God's awesome work!

Learn Out of Door Geography!

Get to know firsthand about rivers, forests, mountains, beaches, streams, wetlands, pastures, creeks! This will come as you simply get out-of-doors!

Keep Lists!

As you go along, you will see many things only once. There are other things you may follow for the entire life span and keep documentation. For these goodies, keep lists! Lists can include animals, birds, life cycles, observations of animals, times for the rising and setting of the sun, temperatures, weather, records of experiments. Just keep each list in the back of your nature notebook.

Keep a Calendar!

This is a good project for the beginning naturalist! A calendar can be made on a 10 X 12 piece of paper OR you can make a calendar on your computer. Just keep a simple calendar of what is found/observed each day. The child can write down nature observations or just draw to narrate their observations! It may be the first flower of the year, the first leaf to fall, the day the puppies were born, or the day you got a goat—keep these memories!

Window Sill Garden

Even if you are not on your own land or in your own home, you can keep a window-sill garden and enjoy watching nature! The children can have their own garden of herbs, carrots, impatiens, geraniums, and marigolds right in your window! It is such a delight to watch flowers come up from seeds into

their full fruit! We have also planted flowers and herbs around the house and around the base of our trees. These are fun to watch and enjoy!

Want to Teach Direction?

The first thing we did was to buy my little one a compass. He thought that was SO big! We let him loose outside. Since then, my husband has found several military manuals about land navigation for himself and just shared that with Matthew. Harold says that the best manual is the ***Military Field Manual on Land Navigation***. These can be found at any surplus store. If your children are interested, find someone from the military or a SWAT team to teach them for a day!

Go to a Natural Spring-fed Creek!

Plan this for a family getaway. Take a book and chairs for you and dad. Let the children play. If it is a spring with rocks, be sure to take shoes for the children so that they will not cut their feet. Pack some snacks, towels, and plenty of water. My children enjoy making up adventures by the dozens—from "building a dam" which teaches them about currents, beavers, so on... to hunting for critters... to making sailboats from cups to race down the creek (beware of those history buffs...they might set a siege against all Yankee ships!). There is just something priceless about the memories from moments of adventure and exploration!

Include Art Prints...

"There are always those present with us whom God whispers in the ear, through whom He sends a direct message to the rest. Among these messengers are the great painters who interpret to us some of the meanings of life. To read their messages aright is a thing due from us. But this, like other good gifts, does not come by nature. It is the reward of humble, patient study." Charlotte Mason, page 102, ***Ourselves***

If we are to keep on to have the resources needed for humble, patient study, we must keep on the look out for nature art. Our favorites are Tasha Tudor, Beatrix Potter, and Audobon. Monet has some beautiful prints that would inspire your little artists. We have found some wonderful prints at

our local Walmart. They are found in a display with the picture frames. The pictures are ready-to-frame. We mounted ours to cardstock paper and slid them into our notebooks. Each child has its own personal collection. We also encourage them to research information about their artist to place into their notebook. This is an easy way to bring beauty into the home!

Some prints that you might want to find might include...*Impression: Sunrise* By Claude Monet...*The Pool at Montgeron* By Claude Monet...*The Artist's Garden at Vetheuil* By Claude Monet...*The Thau* By Claude Monet...*Springtime* By Claude Monet...*Poplars on the Epte* By Claude Monet...*Waterloo Bridge, Cloudy Weather* By Claude Monet...*Waterloo Bridge, Effect of Mist* By Claude Monet...*The Pathway in Monet's Garden at Giverny* By Claude Monet...*Waterlily Pond* By Claude Monet...*Waterlily Pond, Rose Harmony* By Claude Monet...*Waterlilies* (There are several of these painted different years and different times of the year.) By Claude Monet...*The Garden at Giverny* By Claude Monet...*The Grandes Decorations Waterlilies: Morning with Willows* By Claude Monet...*The Grandes Decorations Waterlilies: Morning* By Claude Monet...*The Grandes Decorations Waterlilies: Green Reflections* By Claude Monet...*Japanese Bridge* By Claude Monet...*Adoration of the Lamb* By Van Eyck...*Children by the Sea* By Israel...*Feeding the Birds* By Millet...*First Steps, Angelus* By Millet...*Nightwatch* By Rembrandt...*Pancake Woman* By Israel...*Spring* By Botticelli...*Surrender of Breda* by Velasquez...*The Supper at Emmaus* By Rembrandt...*Bouquet of Spring Flowers* By Renior...*La Grenouillere* By Renior...*Flowers in a Vase* By Renior...*Monet Painting in His Garden* By Renior...*The Seine at Argenteuil* By Renior...*Snowscape* By Renior...*Path Through the Long Grass* By Renior...

We have several really nice art print books. The advantage of the books is that we are able to see entire collections of one artist. These are usually reasonable at big stores like Books-a-Million or Barnes and Nobles. You can find them pretty often on the sales tables for great prices. I found one that was usually \$25 for only a dollar! Our favorite book this year is a collection of Monet. Oh, and while you are studying Nature Art, don't forget lovely landscapes...sunsets...cloudscapes...star-light nights...so on!

Feed the Birds...

*(Ideas from the **Cub Scout Leader How-to Book...NO!***

We do not have funny things hanging out all over our yard! This book is the best idea book for nature studies that I have found!)

You can make bird feeders or just throw out bird feed. Our birds, squirrels and even chickens LOVE whole wheat bread crumbs. Every morning I have a fan club meet me at the door expecting their nutrition for the day! ☺ Here are some simple ideas...

- ⇒ Use an old milk carton or milk jug. Tie a string through the top of the container. Cut out big openings around the container leaving 1 inch or more along the bottom so that food won't spill out. Fill with food and hang out for your feathered friends.
- ⇒ Nail a flat board to a tree stump or pole or even on the windowsill...sprinkle food on it.
- ⇒ Make a bird-bath. For a bird-bath, use a garbage can lid up side down on a section of sewer pipe...tie a brick to the handle and hang inside the sewer pipe.
- ⇒ Make easy bird feeders! Cut the top off of a styrofoam egg carton...use a nail to make a few drainage holes in each egg "cup"...Fill two cups with sand or gravel (keeps styrofoam from blowing away and gives the birds grit to eat)...if in a windy area, nail carton to a post...fill the rest of the cups with bird seeds.

"Cooking" for the Birds...

If you want for birds to come to your yard, the best way to attract them is to feed them! Once they realize that you have food, you will find faithful friends coming daily. A few pointers...

- ⇒ Birds get accustomed to finding food in the same places—be faithful in feeding them!
- ⇒ Birds need good water sources. If you do not have a birdbath, a garbage can lid on a stump will do or you might want to use an old hubcap, disk or shallow pan. In freezing weather, replace water throughout the day.
- ⇒ Feed early every day. Birds are up early looking for food!

- ⇒ Need a cheap food for birds that goes far? Try going to your local farmer's coop to get cracked corn. We usually buy ours for only \$4 a bag! You may even attract other friends!
- ⇒ Sunflower seeds are a delicacy that Finches, Grosbeaks, Woodpeckers, and other seed/grain eating birds devour. You might want to grow sunflower each year in a corner of your yard for these little fellows! (When you harvest the heads, just hang them upside down under a sheltered eave to dry. Then you have food all winter long.)
- ⇒ You can easily find birdseed mixes at most any store. These are reasonably priced.
- ⇒ Birds love nuts. Birds such as Blue Jays and Titmice have strong beaks, which can open nuts. Other birds will need your help in cracking the nuts.
- ⇒ Pick up some beef suet from your butcher for the birds. During the winter, beef suet gives the needed protein for birds to stay warm. They really need this nutrition during the winter when they can no longer find insects.
- ⇒ When making your summer fruit salads, don't forget the birds! They love apples, bananas, and pears. We even toss our peels to our birds.
- ⇒ Just in case you are wondering where to throw out table scraps, birds love popcorn, whole-wheat bread, cheese, cooked rice, breakfast cereal, bits of meat...everything but spoiled food. Never give moldy meat or bread.
- ⇒ You can make a bird cake easily. You need Wild Bird Seed, 12-ounce juice can, $\frac{1}{2}$ pound suet, long piece of wire, and piece of mesh vegetable sack. Cut the vegetable sack to fit inside of the can with extra sticking up above the can top. Cut Suet into small pieces and heat in a double boiler so it won't burn. Let it cool and harden removing any pieces of meat. Once cooled, reheat suet mixing in 1 cup of birdseed. Pour mixture into the can. Set in refrigerator to harden. Once hardened, set can in warm water and carefully run a knife around the inside to loosen sack. Pull the sack out. Tie the ends of the sack with wire, leaving enough wire to hang cake from a tree limb. This same mixture could be molded in a cut-down milk carton or a half a grapefruit shell and just sat on fence posts, stumps, or a bird feeder.

- ⇒ For "birdie delight" you can use 1 cup of melted suet, 3 tablespoons cornmeal, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup peanut butter, 3 tablespoons butter, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup cracked corn, and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup raisins. Melt suet as described above only adding peanut butter during the second heating. After the suet cools the second time, add all of the other ingredients. Follow the rest of the directions above.
- ⇒ Pine-cone treats are easy and fun! Mix together equal amounts of peanut butter and cornmeal—about 2 tablespoons of each. The cornmeal keeps the peanut butter from being too sticky and is safer for the birds to eat. Once mixed, tie a wire or piece of yarn around the pine-cone. Spoon the mixture in between the petals of the pine cone. Hang out for the birds!

Hunt for Nature Hymns!

Make a special section of your nature notebook or copybook or personal journal just for hymns about God's beautiful creation. We have many printed in this book. We also list some you may want to look up. Nature hymns are so inspiring and make a beautiful addition to your nature studies! Oh, don't forget to illustrate!

Picnic Anyone?

Nothing is any more fun than a picnic! Just pack a basket full of lunch or a simple afternoon tea to go. Head out to your favorite spot with just your own sweet family. Of course, you should also think of your dear friends occasionally. ☺ Yes, this is a hint! I am always up for a picnic! Picnics can also be outside your very own door. We LOVE to have picnics on our deck. We curl up on the swing afterwards and enjoy the beauty of nature while enjoying great conversation or our books!

Speaking of a Book...

Don't forget to grab a book to read out-of-doors! You may want to read a biography about the great men and women of science. Go to your non-fiction section of the children's section of the library and load up on their neat books about animals...space... plants...geography. Also, do not forget the treasures found in the fiction section by authors such as Gene Stratton

Porter, Tasha Tudor, Beatrix Potter, Jean Craighead George and Sterling North! Check out the ideas for great books later in this book.

Get a New Pet...

Not too long ago, I wrote a column for *Homeschooling Today* called, "**You Know You Are Homeschooling When...**" I jokingly shared that "You know you are homeschooling when you have acquired a strange pet since you started homeschooling." Well, if strange pets are a true indication of our "authenticity," then I am 24-karat pure now!

We have had the joy of acquiring and growing to love quite a bunch of critters! We have had dogs, cats, goats, birds (Cockatoo, Cockatiels, and African Grey), hermit crabs, rabbits, turtles, chickens...the list is getting so long I am afraid you may start singing "Old MacRushton's had a farm" any second now! ☺ Pets are such an awesome way to teach about God's handiwork while learning all about nature informally. Go ahead, join the ranks of tried and true homeschoolers and adopt a pet...or two!

Before I go on, I have to tell you that you may have some unexpected lessons from your acquisition of "pets." The first year that we began to homeschool brings back memories of *me* teaching lessons for everything. If the children *breathed* a thought of an interest, I was off to bring the opportunity to us or to go to where they could see it first-hand. Well, we had a lesson about God's provision brought to our front door that year!

Matthew decided that he just *had* to find a turtle! I told him to pray for one and that maybe God would work it out for us to go see one or for us to run across one, especially since we lived in the country and had several large ponds behind the house. He prayed and may I say, God *really* answered. That was Saturday night. Well, on the way home from church the next day, our *FIRST* turtle was creeping along the road unsuspecting that it would become a science lesson for an enthusiastic homeschool!

Harold stopped as we praised God for His provision! I was the *lucky one* nominated to hold it on the way home. I have to remind you now that I do not *DO* bugs, dirt or critters! BUT, in the name of *school*, this enthusiastic teacher got the thrill of her life! The little amphibian was *NOT* potty

trained! I found out the hard way on my "dry clean only" dress! Yes! It was **NOT funny**—but tell that to my family (even the TWO children that I spent months carrying in my womb...nursing at ALL hours of the day and night...and even sacrificed sleep and sanity during their bouts with the flu!) who were rolling all over the car in laughter and racing to see who could call Papaw the quickest!

Of course, that was not necessary. Papaw was calling because he thought we might enjoy a turtle! ☺ He found one that day too! We were elated! Once I changed my clothes!

Then, a lesson popped up. Our neighbors had little (morons) children who let our turtles go. Matthew cried and cried. I was mortified! Then, it was as if God whispered in my ear... **"pray again and watch Me work!"** I encouraged Matthew to pray again. That if God could give twice as much as he asked for the first time, then surely God would hear his prayer and give him another one if it were God's will (now I know it was to SHOW OUT! ☺)! Oh, this is where it gets good!

He prayed—although not too happy about his loss. Eighteen turtles of all different varieties later showed up in weird places—even under the carport as if waiting for us to come outside to play. I was humbled! Totally humbled! God showed us more than a mere lesson about an animal—it was a lesson about HIM! A lesson that we would need later as we endured deeper loss!

My only request was that Matthew pray for MONEY next time!! ☺ Ha!

Raise Frogs...

Frogs are amazing as they mature through their life cycle. To raise some frogs yourself, here are some how-to's...

- ⇒ Set up an aquarium. Aquariums can be found cheap at rummage sales or second hand shops.
- ⇒ Frog eggs can be found attached to plants in swampy pools and ponds. Look for clumps with a jelly-like protective coating.
- ⇒ Collect about 30-40 eggs and some of the plants and algae (the scummy stuff!) so that the baby tadpoles will have some food to

eat. Place eggs/plants/algae and pond water in aquarium away from direct sunlight so that water stays somewhat cool.

- ⇒ After tadpoles hatch, they will need to be fed everyday. Collect fresh pond water for fresh food. (use small plants and animals for food) You can also add fish food (available for tropical fish) to the pond water. As tadpoles grow, you can feed them raw meat or fish.
- ⇒ Frogs and toads should be fed live insects, bits of meat, and fish. They LOVE grubs, earthworm, soft insects. Also set up a dry resting-place for adult frogs because they breathe air.

Spend a Day With The Grandparents...

What a treasure house of wisdom about nature! It may be a day of fishing...or a day working bees...or a day in the garden...or a picnic...or an afternoon picking berries...or helping out with the chickens. I guarantee that these memories will be some of the most treasured moments as they get older. I will always treasure moments with Mamaw picking berries or tending the chickens or working in the flowers. Moments that are a rich heritage!

Make Your Own Booklets...

My children have always loved making booklets on topics such as "*Birds in My Backyard*" which was a collection of sketches of birds we spotted right in our front yard. They researched the names of the birds, the nesting habits of the birds, and their favorite foods. They sketched the birds and put the information about the birds into their little booklets, which were made from ideas in Dinah Zike's *Big Book of Books and Activities*. We soon had several to put into their own binder for science. It may be that your child has such a deep interest in one part of nature that they want to develop a notebook just for that such as Kathryn Howshall's *Bird Book* and *Butterfly Book*. That is perfectly fine. Just pick a topic and go!

Daffodil Dancers...

Excerpted from "*A Spring Visit To Mother Nature's Toyshop*"
in *Victorian Family Celebrations*

If the children are eager to visit Mother Nature's Toyshop this spring before their garden has bloomed, bring home a bouquet of daffodils. It will provide them with an amusing interlude playing with "Daffodil Dancers" and animals.

To make your Daffodil Dancers, cut off the blossom of the daffodil, leaving a very short stem. These little stems will become the dancer's hat when you turn the blossom over. To make the flower stand up, push three wooden toothpicks up firmly into the center of the flower. Spread the toothpicks like a tripod to make the flower stand-alone steadily. After you have made several dancers, gather them together as the "daffy down-dilly ladies just come to town" in their fancy capes and pretty gowns. Place them on a tin tray and gently tap from underneath and the dancers will begin to move.

For daffodil animals, gently peel away the outer petals, leaving the short green stem and the long flower cup. Hold the cup sideways so that the stem becomes the animal's head and long green nose; insert four wooden toothpicks for legs.

Nature Rubbings...

The first time I ever saw a nature rubbing was when my friend Cindy Harris showed me a rubbing she did of a tombstone from an old graveyard. The picture was spectacular! She framed her rubbing and had it hanging over her bed. Of course, Cindy was an "advanced" artist, but our children can do simple nature rubbings of trees...flowers...leaves...so on! These would be precious framed, given as cards, OR just kept in their nature notebooks!

If you want to try your hand at a nature rubbing, all you need is colored chalk or crayons...paper...tape. Just tape down your piece of paper gently on the object and lightly rub over it with the chalk or crayon! Wala! A neat project for the nature notebook or as a gift!

Feather Collection...

Wondering what to do with feathers that are found along the way? We have used acid-free paper in 60-pound weight to mount our feathers upon. A simple label at the bottom will hold the feather onto the paper while giving a perfect label to write the name of the bird, date, and location on. Slide the paper into a plastic sleeve protector to keep the page protected the very best. Your children might want to use extras for pictures framed to give as gifts. A cute gift would be a sparrow feather with the Bible verse from either Matthew 10:31 or Luke 12:7 typed on the picture. What an encouragement for a friend!

Make Your Own Nature Coloring Book...

My daughter *loves* to draw and sketch! If you have an Elisabeth in your family, let them design their own coloring books on Nature. Little children love them because a "big" girl or boy has made them. Other mothers love them because they are a natural and easy way to teach the children about various fields of science. They make super gifts! Who knows, your child may be able to even begin their own home business! All while developing their art skills and learning science!

Go to a Spring Fed Creek!

Want a treat? I shared earlier in the book about our family day at the creek. There are lessons by the millions right at your local creek! Children love to explore and moms love to have a moment to relax. A creek offers those opportunities along with the multitude of lessons that can only be learned by observation. On our trip, our children found little treasures ranging from interesting rocks to edible plants to frog eggs to pond life (*I call that scum...Harold says that LIFE sounds more knowledgeable!* 😊).

On their own, they noticed the currents in the stream especially the strength of the currents as they tried to "build a dam" in the creek! I could hear the conversation that I was "pretending" not to hear while I looked down at my book (*Mommy time! YES! That is legal for REAL Nature Study Queens!!*) and swelled with pride. They were discussing a lesson from years ago about how Wilson Dam was built. They were marveling over the ingenuity