

A Beginner's Guide to Nature Journals

By Kipp Dietrich



A stand of trees in Tinker's Creek State Nature Preserve.

What is a Nature Journal?

At its core, a nature journal is a journal about nature. It starts with a walk through nature at least once a week while writing about all the things you hear, smell, see, as well as the temperature, wind, and weather. But it can be so much more than just that. A nature journal can be whatever you want it to be. It can be a short list of what you see when out on a walk, an inspirational poem you have had on your mind, a picture you drew, a song you listened to, or a stray thought that popped into your head. It is all about what you're feeling in the moment. All it takes is a little bit of effort and a desire to get outside.

Do you hear the snow crunching or the breeze blowing? Do you see the leaves rustling or a bird flying? Can you smell the flowers or the scent of fresh rain? Can you feel the slick mud or a warm summer breeze on your face? Can you taste the deliciously tart flavor from the wild blackberries that just came in season or the peppery, raw flavor of a freshly pulled ramp? Paint a picture of what you're seeing with words. Truly describe what you're experiencing so that you can notice small things that would otherwise go unnoticed. This will allow you to vividly remember this day.

Now, this is where you can truly make this nature journal your own. Add some funny things you heard, or a meaningful quote, or that song lyric that's been stuck in your head all day. And if you can, create a drawing to capture what you're seeing. This is a journal, so drawings aren't required, but taking a few moments to focus on your surroundings and drawing what you see helps to keep you in the moment. A picture says a thousand words, even if it is stick figures.

Do yourself a favor, and fill your nature journal. Try to go out at least once a week, don't let the weather stop you. If it's sunny and warm, wear some short sleeves and sandals, if it's cold wear a jacket, hat, mittens, and boots. Layer up if you have to. To paraphrase Alfred Wainwright, There's no such thing as "too hot" or "too cold," only people who are poorly dressed.

What do I do once my Nature Journal is full?

Once you have completed your nature journal, you can decide what you would like to do with it. You can keep it for yourself and look back at all the exciting things you saw or remember how you were feeling on a particular day. You can share it with your kids or grandkids to appreciate as a keepsake and vice versa; a child's nature journal filled with colorful pictures of everyday thoughts would certainly be a wonderful, heartfelt present. And if you're not a sentimental person, you can recycle it or use it as kindling. Whatever you decide to do with your nature journal, once it's complete, start a new one.

Review:

- A nature journal is a nature-focused journal. At its core, it's still a personal journal. It just has a nature topic/theme, and it's meant to be written in nature.
- To begin writing your nature journal, you will need a notebook and a pen.
- Go out for a walk, ideally out in nature away from the city (If you can't get out in nature, walk around the city and appreciate the neighborhood wildlife or unique architecture. Enjoying a walk through your backyard counts. You decide what type of nature walk you want to take).
- Write down the temperature, wind conditions, weather.
- Write down what you see, hear, smell, feel, taste.
- Write down whatever comes to you (a song you have stuck in your head, a poem, an inspirational quote, how you're feeling).
- Try to add a drawing to capture something you experienced in nature.
- Try to walk in nature at least once a week.
- Create a journal for yourself, someone you love, or just for the sake of doing something outside.

