

For All Ages!

# NATURE JOURNALING IN A NUTSHELL

Draw Botanical's quick guide to  
jumpstart your exploration



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# WELCOME

to this quick guide to nature journaling. Let's get started with this joyful practice!

Your enthusiasm is the best thread you can follow to lead you on this journey, so be curious about what you want to learn and explore! Be willing to get creative and make the practice your own!



## WHAT IS NATURE JOURNALING?



Nature journaling combines studying nature with traditional writing in a journal through drawing, observing, and asking questions. To start this artistic and scientific practice, head out with a journal and some supplies to a natural spot, explore the area, and record in your journal what you observe.

### YOU CAN DO THIS

If you identify with one (or more!) of the following:

- You are a lover of nature.
- You enjoy drawing, writing, and/or inquiring.
- You want to understand nature better.
- You want to understand yourself better.
- You want something to do while you go out on a hike.
- You want to create a record to remember things you find in nature.



## WHY PRACTICE NATURE JOURNALING?

Like a meditation on nature, nature journaling can create a state of inner calm. The practice fosters feelings of reverence and wonder towards nature as well as gratitude for our experience of the world in all its magnificence, life, and beauty. Your journal can also become a meaningful record full of loving reflections and joyful memories of time spent in various natural places. But don't take our word for it - try it and see for yourself what experiences the practice cultivates in you!

## PLACES TO VISIT

In addition to supplies, it's a good idea to have a natural place you want to go and explore. It can be nice to visit the same place again and again to keep noticing what new things you can find and develop a deeper connection to a place. You may also want to vary your explorations by adventuring with your nature journal supplies when you go on a hike, to a nature center, park, local farm, or just sit in your backyard or look out your window. You can take your nature journal supplies on vacations, road trips, anywhere you might find yourself with a few extra minutes to create a record of where you've been and what you've seen.



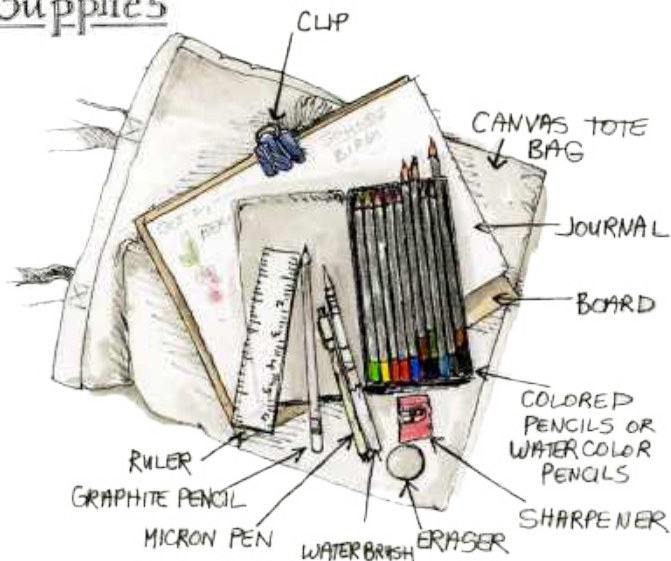
# ART SUPPLIES

All you need is some paper, a pencil, and your willingness to explore, either outdoors, or with some natural items you've brought inside. We suggest gathering a kit of portable art supplies based on what you like to use. Have fun trying different supplies to find what works best for you!

## RECOMMENDED NATURE JOURNALING SUPPLIES

- Paper (see next pages)
- Graphite pencil
- Eraser
- Micron pen
- Pencil sharpener
- Colored pencils
- Watercolor pencils
- Water brush (for painting, adding water to watercolor pencils)
- Clipboard
- Magnifying glass
- Small (see-through) ruler

## Art Supplies



# THE JOURNAL

Use what works for you! Try single sheets or a pad of paper, a store bought notebook, or a handmade journal. (See the next page for how to make an accordion journal.)



Accordion Journal by Vikki Armstrong

Sewing and making larger handmade journals both saves money and allows you to create beautiful and unique journal works of art! Crafting a handmade journal can be very motivating towards helping you return again and again to filling its pages. You also get to choose any paper and any size journal you wish.



If you want to keep a year-long or perpetual journal, this is a really great option. Learn more about this in the resources on the back cover under Further Connections.

## JOURNALS TO BUY

- The Laws Sketchbook for Nature Journaling by John Muir Laws
- Stillman and Birn Premium Sketchbook Mixed Media (6" x 8")
- Stillman and Birn Epsilon and Zeta Series (The Zeta series has heavier paper if you plan to do a lot of watercolor. They come in Wirebound, Hardbound and Softbound.)
- Draw Botanical's custom made sketchbook pads (5" x 8" or 8" x 11")

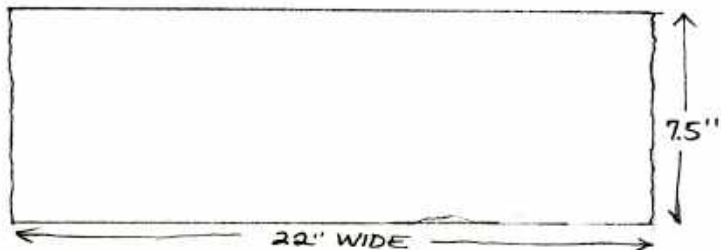
# HOW TO MAKE AN ACCORDION NATURE JOURNAL



Our favorite type of journal is accordion-style because you can open it up and see all the work in a progression, as opposed to a more traditionally-bound book where you need to flip through the pages to see each entry individually. Making your own book can also provide a fulfilling sense of ownership and accomplishment.

Here we are teaching you to make a 5 1/2" x 7 1/2" journal with a front and back cover and 4 pages, but you can adjust the dimensions and size of the book based on the paper you are using and what size journals you wish to make.

- 1** Paper Specifications. We recommend a high quality art paper of 250 gsm (or 140 lb), but at minimum use 165 gsm (90 lb) or watercolor paper (hot or cold press). We have chosen to get paper that is 22" x 30" and cut it into strips with a paper cutter, but you may find a different size, and adjust these measurements as needed.
- 2** From a large piece of paper, cut the paper into 4 equal strips that are 22" long and 7 1/2" wide. (Each strip will make 1 journal.)

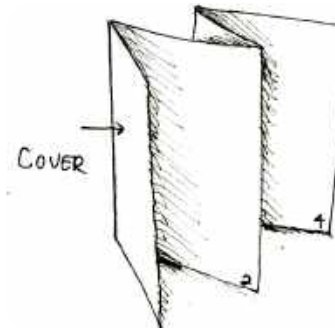
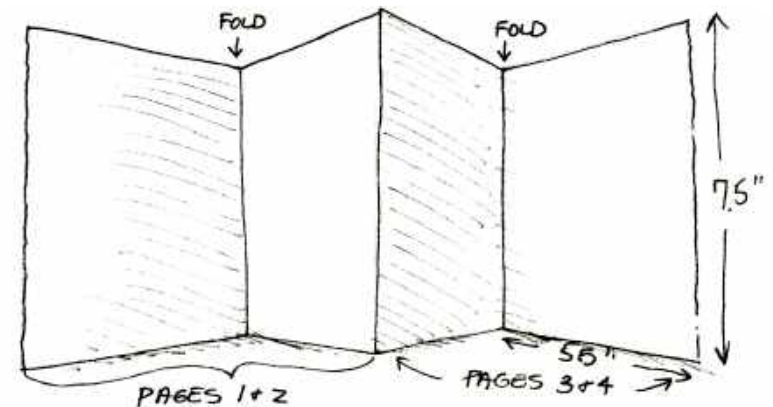


- 3** Fold the paper in half, so that you have an 11"x 7 1/2" strip. Crease the fold, then open the paper. (You can use a ruler or some sort of flat edge to help you create your pages.)



- 4** Fold each half in half again with the ends coming in towards the center line. Crease.

- 5** Unfold the pages and crease the folds the other way. Use the ruler or flat edge to help create tight creases that fold forwards and backwards.



- 6** Flip the fold around to allow them to come together in such a way as to create an accordion, with a front cover, then a page that folds in, then a fold out, and so on. (Refold your book if necessary to create the proper sequence of pages.)

You can adapt this book by gluing, taping, or tying multiple accordion-folded sheets together to make a really long strand, or make multiple books, one for each season of the year, one for each month, or whatever best serves you.

# IDEAS FOR STUDY

The limit to what you can include on your pages is as boundless as nature itself. Below are a few ideas and suggestions from us. As always, we encourage you to create your own ideas and follow the threads of your inspiration to what is curious, wonderful, and interesting for you.



## PLANTS

- Parts of plants - roots, stems, leaves, flowers, fruits, and seeds
- Trees
- Edible and medicinal plants
- Dissection and cross-section of a plant
- Study a garden
- Plant pollinators (butterflies, bees, etc.)
- Plant ecosystems (forests, plains, mountains)

## ANIMALS

- Animals in the landscape and their habitats and homes
- Animal footprints, tracking patterns, and how they move
- Birds and bird feathers
- Animal sounds



## DECORATING THE COVERS

Enjoy decorating the front and back cover of your journal. You can choose to include a title, your name, location, date/season, and fun decorations!



# ENVIRONMENT

- Landscapes
- Weather - seasons, sun, sky and clouds, rain and snow
- Tracking biodiversity in an area and keeping records (like a mini field guide)
- Water cycle and flow through the area
- What's underground - soil, layers, rocks, insects and animals
- Change over time
- Rocks and geology
- Buildings, fences, other human-made structures



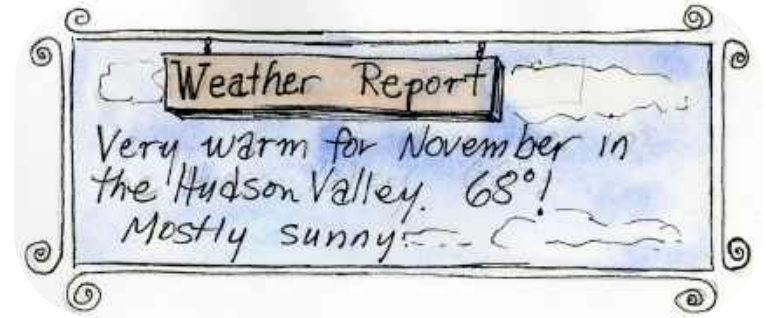
## SENSORY

- Use one sense as a focus - see, hear, taste, touch, smell
- Study colors in the landscape and match those with your art supplies
- Make maps of an area
- Write poetry or a short story about your experience in nature and the feelings that emerge
- Compare one thing to another - study different things side by side
- Find as many different kinds of one thing in an area (ex. leaves, rocks, or feathers)
- Record patterns in nature
- Go on a noticing journey - start from something you notice to the next to the next and keep noticing as much as you can and record what you find
- Go on an inquiry journey - ask a question and explore where it takes you, without needing to answer the question, but see where it leads



# PAGE LAYOUT

Contemplate for yourself how your practice is going and set intentions for your work. Below is an example of a nature journal page with some suggestions of what to include to dive deeper into the pages you create.



Places

People

Dates

Objects

False Nettle

My Mandolin

My assistant LEO

Mulberry

Velvety false-lupine

Shading

Format Features (Boxes, Decorations)

Techniques Practice

Pictures, Observational Drawings

Colors

Species Names

Titles

JUNIORS WOODSHE

Found Chenille past Winters cottage on the left low area

Chanterelles!

Mushroom Walk with Colin McCaffrey

By Oak tree + moss

Find Old man in the woods ? ?

- Black Trumpets
- Chanterelles
- Hen of the Woods

Morella by old Ash + Dead Elms

Book recommendation: "Entangled Life" by Rupert Sheldrake

Found mushrooms on wood

Plutinus cervinus

BIG OAKS for Hen of the Woods - September 2022

Partridge Berry

Mitchella repens

Big find of the day

Landscapes

Fun Lettering

Questions

Details

Arrows

Lists

Observations, Descriptions

The way you organize each page of your nature journal can be unique.

## I NOTICE, I WONDER, IT REMINDS ME OF

Record some answers to questions like, "What do you notice?," "What do you wonder?," and "What are you reminded of?" to help improve your observation skills, inquire and ask questions, and make connections.

I notice...  
ruffly petals

I wonder...  
how do the flowers grow  
what do they smell like?

It reminds me of...  
spirals      broccoli

Don't limit yourself to only the suggestions!  
Use your creativity, and include anything you want.

- Date, place, and time**
- Weather and temperature**
- Words** (titles, subtitles, species names, descriptions of observations, feelings and sounds)
- Pictures** (observational drawings from nature, landscapes, colors, details, habit sketches, maps, objects)
- Numbers** (counting things, measurements, estimating, dates, scale)
- Format features** (boxes, lists, dividers, arrows, etc. to organize the page)
- Observations and descriptions** (I notice)
- Connections** (It reminds me of)
- Questions from observations** (I wonder)
- Varying scales of sizes** (ex. close up of a pinecone with a small landscape of the forest it came from, or a map of the trail you took to get there)
- Draw across multiple pages** (ex. mountain range along the bottom edge of multiple pages in your accordion-style journal, so when you unfold the pages, there is a common thread)

# ART AND OBSERVATIONAL DRAWING SKILLS

Consider your nature journal page as both a work of art and also a scientific record. Include all you can so that when you look back, you'll remember lots of what you learned about the natural world that day.

Spend as much time as you are able in the field, documenting all you can. We recommend at least getting down general shapes, shading, and color matching so that if you need to add to your pages later at home, you have the basics down already.



Remember, nature journaling is a practice for everyone, regardless of how great an artist you think you are (or are not). The goal of this practice is not to make amazing art (which we are sure you will!), but to create something that is totally unique, completely you, and captures an experience that only you can be having in this specific place and time.

On these next few pages, we'll explore some basic art skills that will help you in your nature journaling practice, starting with some basic observational drawing skills followed by an exploration of color theory and adding color to your pages. No matter your skill level, come back to these basic skills again and again as you draw, and you will see your drawing improve.



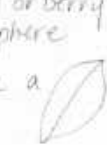
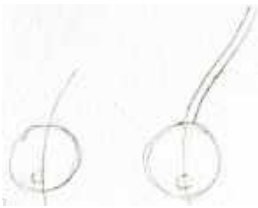
# OBSERVATIONAL DRAWING

For drawing while observing, you need to be set up with enough space to both look at your subject and draw. To follow along with the practice detailed below, we suggest you look at a simple plant from nature, such as a leaf, stem, branch, or perhaps a berry or rounded fruit like a tomato.

## WITH PENCIL AND PEN

**1 Look at what you are drawing.** Notice basic shapes first. You can also hold up a ruler to measure what size it is and make marks for this size on your page, or make it larger or smaller if you like. (To get the most accurate measurements, keep your head still and your eyes in one place because moving changes the angle, and you will perceive different measurements.)

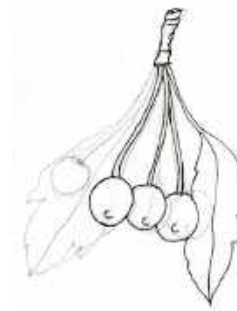
*A round nut, fruit or berry is like a sphere  
A leaf is like a*

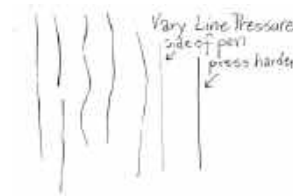
**2 Map out with your graphite pencil where the central axis of the shape is.** You will erase this later, but it is a good way to start grounding your shape so that we can show symmetry from this axis. Draw lightly with a pencil so you can easily adjust it and erase later.



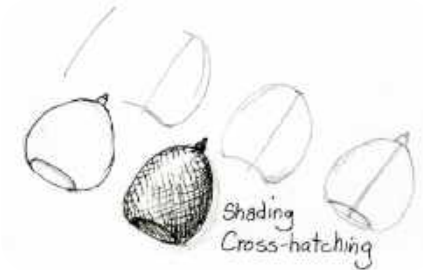
**3 Draw an outline of the outer edges of your shape in relation to the central axis.** Draw one side and then the other side in separate strokes. (It is much easier to draw lines in stages rather than one continuous line.) Notice how there are no straight lines in nature. Your form likely has lots of curved or branching lines. Look at the way the shape and lines are formed and try to replicate that on your page.



**5 Switch to your pen to go over those pencil lines to darken them, and erase the central axis.**



**4 Adjust** this as much as you'd like with your pencil, again, drawing lightly and erasing or changing the lines as needed, until it looks accurate. If it doesn't look quite right, use your ruler to check your object's size again to make sure it's proportional.



**6 Practice shading techniques.** Use the pen to shade any darker areas and make sure to leave any lighter areas (highlights) untouched. Vary the pressure of how you push down on the pen to create lighter lines and darker ones. Also consider that if any shapes are overlapping, often you can show this by darkening what is in back and keeping what is in front lighter. Practice obtaining various tones from light to dark with the pen, both with swatches on the sides of your pages and within the objects you are drawing.





# COLOR THEORY

## 1. Primary Colors

Yellow Red Blue

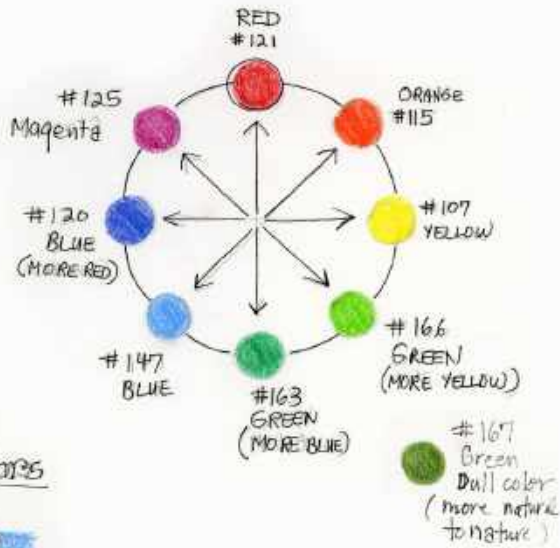
Primary colors cannot be created by mixing colors, but all other colors can be created by mixing various amounts of primary colors.

## 2. Secondary Colors

Orange, Violet, Green



Colors in nature (especially greens) tend to be duller than the bright greens that you might find in your art supplies. Dull your bright greens by adding a tiny bit of their complement (red, magenta, or orange).



## 3. Complementary Colors



COMPLEMENTARY COLORS = OPPOSITE ON COLOR WHEEL



# ADDING COLOR

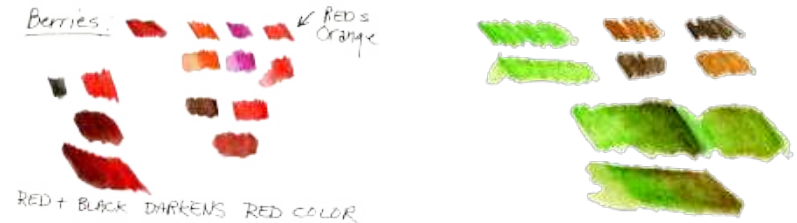
**1** Choose your coloring supplies - colored pencils, watercolor pencils with a brush, or paint.



**2** Looking at your object, make note of what color it is. Then look at the colors you have from your art supplies. Hold up a pencil or paint color to check if it's close to what you are looking at. Notice if the actual color on your object is lighter or darker, or brighter or duller. Does the color feel warm or cool? Use the various colors you have to try and mix and match the correct color.



**3** Test the color you've made on your paper, mixing and matching and layering colors to see what you can get.



**4** Add color to your form, but leave your highlights (lightest areas) empty. Vary the color density for darker and lighter areas.






# LETTERING

Lettering can be a fun way to customize your nature journal to fit your style. The way you write your letters affects the feelings they evoke. For example, letters with serifs (little feet on the ends of letters, like Times New Roman) feel more traditional and serious, and letters without those feet (sans serif, like Arial) have smoother edges that feel more modern and cheerful. If you want your journal to feel more swanky, experiment with *cursive* handwriting. The only way to develop your personal lettering style is to practice! See below for some suggestions.

## HEADER TEXT

**BOLD** OPEN SHADOWS

*Cursive* Serifs

CROSSBAR HEIGHT ADJUSTMENTS

WIDTH and HEIGHT ADJUSTMENTS

## WATERCOLOR



Draw with the watercolor pencil as if it were any colored pencil. With a wet brush, activate and spread the color. If you want some white areas, like highlights, do not put color in those places.

## Body Text

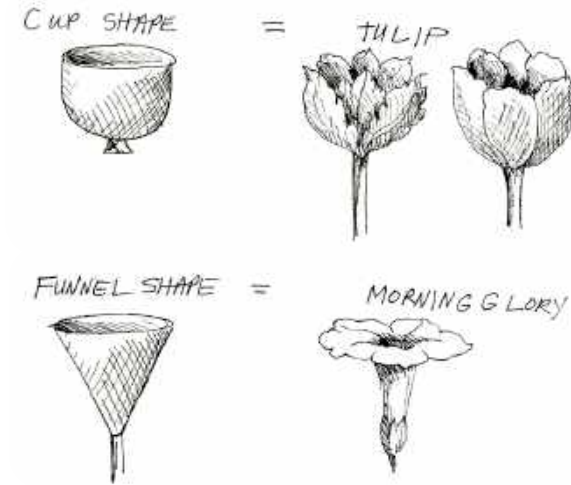
Develop your own style/font that is similar to your own handwriting so you have the stamina to write long blocks of consistent text.





# DRAWING FLOWERS

Flowers come in many shapes. Before you start to draw your chosen flower, ask yourself, "What simple shape is this?" This will help you know which parts of your flower to shade darker and which you should leave white for your highlight.



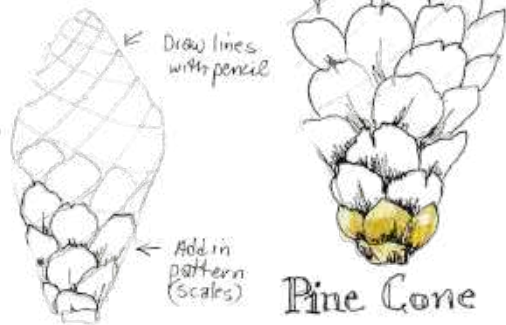
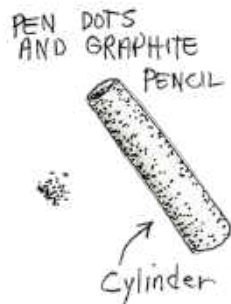
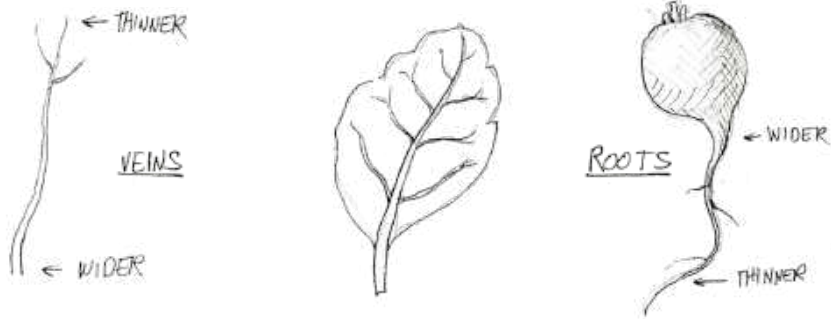
Try drawing the same flower from different points of view.

CIRCLES  
& ELLIPSES  
= DAISY



# PATTERNS AND TEXTURES

Study patterns and textures and try to copy exactly what you see. Here are some ideas to help you get started.



# MOVING CREATURES

Start with simple shapes for your animal, bird, or insect. Using a center axis that describes the movement of the form is helpful. Snap a quick photo to look at in case your subject goes away.



# LANDSCAPES

Decide on a box, either horizontal or vertical, for your landscape. Keep it small at first. (I like to make my box proportions 1 to 2.) Snapping a quick photo can help you visualize the scale of the overall landscape and the tonal variations that are important to show. Begin with a horizon line. Sketch lightly with pencil mapping out the basic shapes, and then go back over with tones and colors.



(Vertical)



(Horizontal)







# FURTHER CONNECTIONS



We teach workshops in botanical art and nature journaling. Feel free to contact us or sign up for one of our courses to become part of our ever-growing community of nature lovers and artists! See our latest offerings at [drawbotanical.com](https://drawbotanical.com)

If you want to learn to **sew your own book**, check this out: <https://tinyurl.com/making-handmade-books>

For more on **perpetual journals**, look to **Lara Gastinger** at [laracallgastinger.com](https://laracallgastinger.com)



Here are a few **books** we've enjoyed on this topic:  
The Laws Guide to Nature Drawing and Journaling by **John Muir Laws**  
Keeping A Nature Journal by **Clare Walker Leslie** and **Charles E. Roth**  
Nature Anatomy by **Julia Rothman**

Share the joy of this practice with your family, friends, and local community! Schools, local nature centers, or parks are a few great places to consider hosting a nature journaling club. This can be a fulfilling activity to share with others and also a motivating factor to get us out practicing and connecting.

If you need help or support in your practice, we are here! You can reach us via email at [info@drawbotanical.com](mailto:info@drawbotanical.com).



**Thank you to the Ashokan Center** for supporting the development of this program and guide. To see all of the wonderful programs they offer, visit them at [ashokancenter.org](https://ashokancenter.org)

Thanks for reading! We hope you are already enjoying nature journaling. If you haven't gotten started yet, now is the time! Take this book with you, and go get out there! May your practice help you connect in more meaningful ways to yourself and your world.



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