



Spring Surprises

You're on a Quest!

Have you ever spoken with an “old timer,” someone who remembers when the maple sap runs, when the fiddlehead ferns emerge each year, and who knows if the spring peepers are early or late? Can anyone you know look at the sky and predict with precision the week when the trout lilies will bloom?

This may seem a bit miraculous sometimes, but the exciting thing is that we all can become trained to recognize patterns in nature. It just takes a little practice and some record keeping to get us started.

On a warm spring day, nothing is more exciting than going out on a search through your backyard, neighboring fields, or nearby forests, looking for signs of the season. In this activity, your family can go together on a quest for spring. You will need to keep track of a few key indicators of your choosing, and you will need to store your information to compare against your findings in future years. You will also learn about a Web site that lets people all over the country keep track of the “migration” of spring every year.



Getting Started



First you must decide what to look for and record. Some people prefer to observe birds, while others like examining flowers or ferns. Perhaps you'd even like to follow the emergence of different plants that grow in ditches along the road. Whatever your fancy, it will be helpful to have a field guide to help you identify what you have found. (Some good ones include the Peterson field guide series; the Golden guides – the longer, more complete Golden versions rather than the pocket ones; and the National Geographic series.) Field guides can be found in the library and/or in the nature section of your local bookstore. You can also visit a Web site like www.amazon.com and search for “field guides” and “flowers,” or whichever category your family has selected.

Keeping Track

With field guide in hand, all you need now is a place to keep track of your findings and a commitment to **watch and record at least once every week** or so. For each observation entry, be sure to record the following:

- the **date**
- a description of the **weather that week** (especially general temperature trends and any unusual weather patterns)



- a listing of **what you sighted** on that date (this should include the name of the organism and a reference page in your field guide; you might also include a sketch with notes)
- a description of **where** the sighting was made (so that you can return on a yearly basis to watch for the same signs)

You will really enjoy digging out your records next year and reviewing them to see how the new season compares.

Need Help?

A nice example of a general-purpose nature journal can be found at:

<http://www.nenature.com/NotesArchive/NatureJournal0930Thru100602.htm>.

Finally, you might be interested to know of a Web site where people from all over the United States work together to track the migration of spring. The site is called Journey North: <http://www.learner.org/jnorth>. Visitors to this site choose an indicator that they will watch out for. Then, while they are waiting for spring to come to their area, they can periodically check on the progress of their indicator as it creeps ever northward. Archives are available now for viewing the events of prior years.

Have fun on your **QUEST!**



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