

# Parenting Tip of the Month

## November



Lower Elementary Teachers

# Why Kids Need to Spend Time in Nature

## Why go outside?

Recent studies have exposed the benefit—even necessity—of spending time outdoors, both for kids and adults. Some argue that it can be any outdoor environment. Some claim it has to be a “green” environment—one with trees and leaves. Others still have shown that just a picture of greenery can benefit mental health. These nuances aside, most of the studies agree that kids who play outside are smarter, happier, more attentive, and less anxious than kids who spend more time indoors. While it’s unclear how exactly the cognitive functioning and mood improvements occur, there are a few things we do know about why nature is good for kids’ minds.

- **It builds confidence.** The way that kids play in nature has a lot less structure than most types of indoor play. There are infinite ways to interact with outdoor environments, from the backyard to the park to the local hiking trail or lake, and letting your child choose how he treats nature means he has the power to control his own actions.
- **It promotes creativity and imagination.** This unstructured style of play also allows kids to interact meaningfully with their surroundings. They can think more freely, design their own activities, and approach the world in inventive ways.
- **It teaches responsibility.** Living things die if mistreated or not taken care of properly, and entrusting a child to take care of the living parts of their environment means they’ll learn what happens when they forget to water a plant, or pull a flower out by its roots.
- **It provides different stimulation.** Nature may seem less stimulating than your son’s violent video game, but in reality, it activates more senses—you can see, hear, smell, and touch outdoor environments. “As the young spend less and less of their lives in natural surroundings, their senses narrow,” and this reduces the richness of human experience.
- **It gets kids moving.** Most ways of interacting with nature involve more exercise than sitting on the couch. Your kid doesn’t have to be joining the local soccer team or riding a bike through the park—even a walk will get her blood pumping. Not only is exercise good for kids’ bodies, but it seems to make them more focused, which is especially beneficial for kids with ADHD.
- **It makes them think.** Nature creates a unique sense of wonder for kids that no other environment can provide. The phenomena that occur naturally in backyards and parks everyday make kids ask questions about the earth and the life that it supports.
- **It reduces stress and fatigue.** According to the Attention Restoration Theory, urban environments require what’s called directed attention, which forces us to ignore distractions and exhausts our brains. In natural environments, we practice an effortless type of attention known as soft fascination that creates feelings of pleasure, not fatigue.

So while screen time is the easier, more popular choice, it’s important to set aside time for outdoor play. For fun, stimulating activities you and your kids can do in nature.

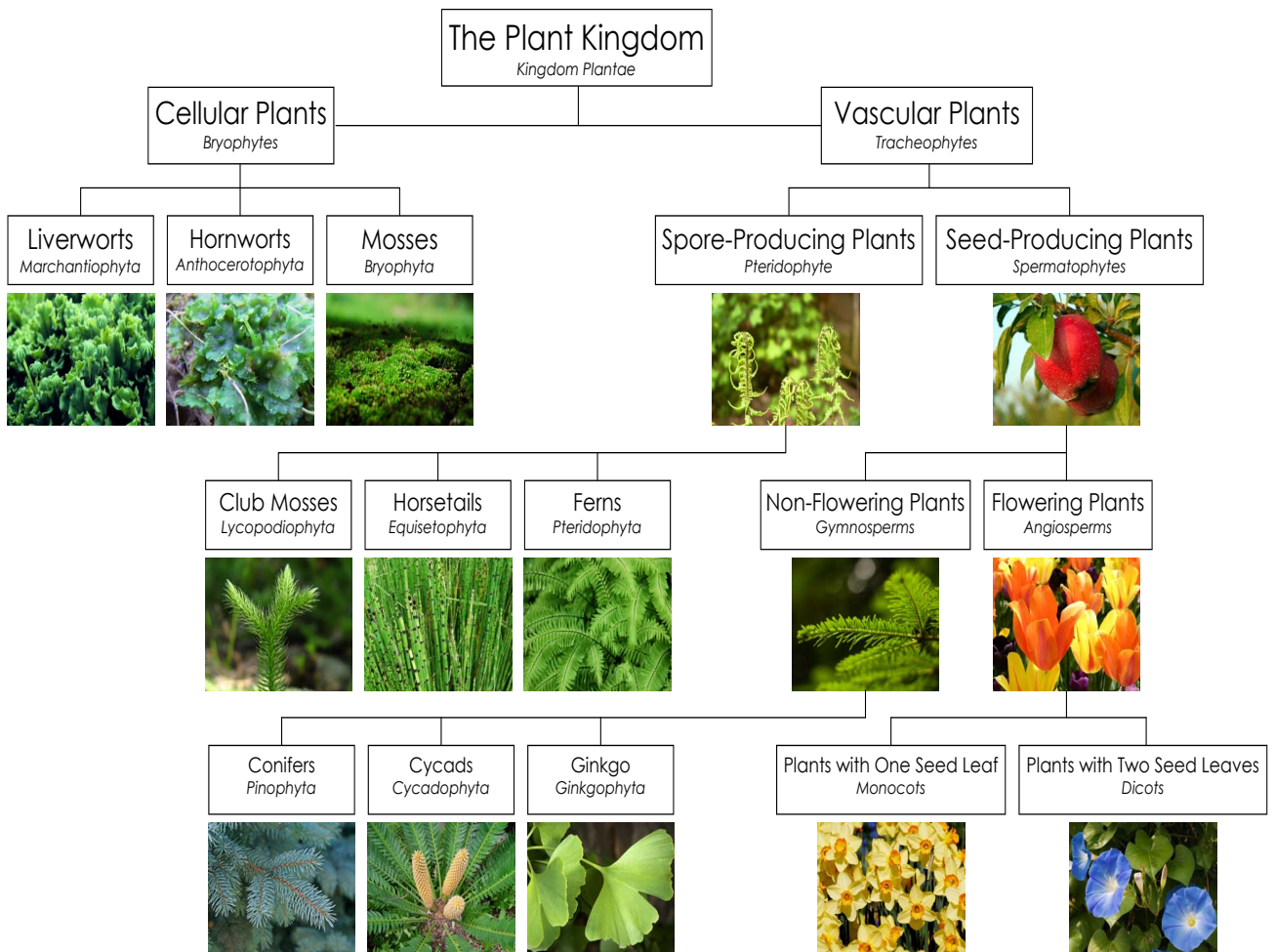
# Material of the Month

## November



Lower Elementary Teachers

# Botany Curriculum



Lessons in botany give the child knowledge of the plant kingdom. Through her experiences exploring nature, caring for plants in the classroom and growing a garden she learns that plants are living organisms with needs. She discovers, on her own, these basic needs of plants by conducting simple experiments in the classroom. While the child is learning about the great diversity of plants in nature she is also acquiring valuable skills in the scientific process of classification. With the support of the Natural World Chart, Plant Kingdom Charts and various Plant Sorting Cards absorbs the fundamental differences between plants and animals. Through classification games, plant stories or "Who Am I?" cards, nomenclature cards, and other activities she begins her education on the plants from around the world.

*"While the child is learning about the great diversity of plants in nature she is also acquiring valuable skills in the scientific process of classification."*

At the elementary level the botany curriculum is divided into sections, with each one corresponding to a part of the plant. The leaves are introduced first since they are often the most prominent part of the plant and the easiest to recognize across different species. The child begins with an impressionistic lesson about the function of the leaf so that she has a context for understanding its anatomical structure. The parts of the leaf are then introduced through an examination of a real leaf and work with the nomenclature cards and description booklets. Variations among types of leaves are the third lesson followed by various specializations of leaves. At this time the child is exploring the diversity in leaf veins, leaf arrangements on the stem, leaf shapes and margins.

### **The Whole Plant**

The child goes on to study the stems and roots, then flowers, fruits and finally seeds, for obvious order of progression. Each part is examined in detail so the child can develop a deeper understanding of its function, anatomical structure, variation of types and specializations. Throughout the three-year curriculum she will have also covered such topics as photosynthesis, flower symmetry, pollination, seed dispersal, monocotyledons and dicotyledons, plant life cycles, plant geography, the important relationships plants have with animal life, and the evolutionary history of plants according to the Timeline of Life.