



# BECOME A NEIGHBORHOOD NATURALIST!

## A Spring Backyard Challenge

Spring is a time of change: the weather warms, birds return, and plants push through soil. The study of these seasonal changes is called **phenology**. Think of it as nature’s calendar, and you’re helping mark down all of the important events. Whether you live in the city or out in the woods, this challenge will test your ability to tune your ears and eyes to the signs of spring. Grab your friends and family, and let’s get started!

**GUIDELINES:** Complete challenges to earn badges using your backyard or nearby green space. The more you complete, the more badges you earn. Can you become a neighborhood naturalist?

## LEVEL UP!

Complete more challenges to move up to the next level. Compete with friends and family for even more fun!



**1-4 CHALLENGES  
FLEDGLING  
PHENOLOGIST**



**5-7 CHALLENGES  
EAGLE-EYED  
ECOLOGIST**



**8 CHALLENGES  
NEIGHBORHOOD  
NATURALIST**



## BACKYARD CHALLENGES

### Identify three trees.

This could be tricky in the spring! If trees have leaves or needles (or if there are dead ones on the ground), use this key from the Arbor Day Foundation. If trees don’t have leaves, pay attention to the twigs and use this tool from the University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point to help you.

- **Arbor Day Foundation Tree Identification Field Guide**  
<https://www.arborday.org/trees/whatTree/>
- **University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point Winter Tree Identification Key**  
<https://www.uwsp.edu/cnr-ap/leaf/Documents/LEAFWinterTreeIDKey.pdf>



### List three different trees

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### Keep a phenology journal.

A phenology journal tracks seasonal changes. Find a spot in your yard and mark a big circle around it—around fifteen feet in diameter. This is your study area. Observe it at the same time each day for two weeks. Record date, time, temperature and your observations of plants, wildlife and insects. What’s growing? What’s changing? What’s new?



- **iNaturalist Phenology Tracker**  
Take the next step! Use the iNaturalist app to record, organize and share your observations.  
<https://www.inaturalist.org/>

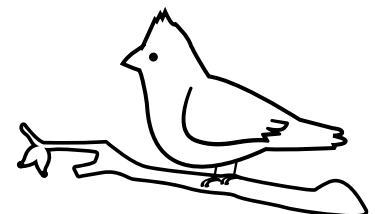
### Identify three birds in your neighborhood.

Use a bird guide if you have one, or check out the Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s website. You can also download the free Merlin Bird ID app on your smartphone.

- **Cornell Lab of Ornithology Online Bird Guide** <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/search>
- **Cornell Lab of Ornithology Merlin Bird ID App** <https://merlin.allaboutbirds.org/>

### List three different birds

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_



# BECOME A NEIGHBORHOOD NATURALIST!

## A Spring Backyard Challenge



### Identify three wildflowers.



Spring is the perfect time to look for wildflowers, including the state flower, the wood violet. Using this key from the Wisconsin State Herbarium, can you find any of the following near where you live?

• **April Wildflowers**

<http://wisflora.herbarium.wisc.edu/checklists/checklist.php?cl=23&pid=9>

• **May Wildflowers**

<http://wisflora.herbarium.wisc.edu/checklists/checklist.php?cl=33&pid=9>

### List three wildflowers you found

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

### Find three signs of animal or insect homes.

Animals and insects live in a variety of places including holes, trees and even plant stems. Find evidence of a home using the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Primer. Describe the home and what might live there.



Example: Brush pile, rabbit

• **Wisconsin Wildlife Primer**

[https://dnr.wi.gov/files/PDF/pubs/wm/WM0220\\_a.pdf](https://dnr.wi.gov/files/PDF/pubs/wm/WM0220_a.pdf)

### List three signs of animal or insect homes

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

### Make a rain gauge.



What to do when it's too wet to go outside? Make a rain gauge! In this video, Eau Claire meteorologist Matt Schaefer makes it easy for you to measure the total inches of rain for one week.

• **How to Make a Rain Gauge Video and Instructions**

<https://wqow.com/2020/03/26/kid-friendly-activity-build-a-rain-gauge-ahead-of-weekend-rain-chances/>

### Predict the weather.



Go outside and look up—what types of clouds do you see? The University Corporation for Atmospheric Research can help you identify and decode the meanings of different clouds. Is more rain in the forecast?

• **Cloud Types**

<https://scied.ucar.edu/learning-zone/clouds/cloud-types>

### Sketch some of the clouds you see

### Uncover evidence of three animals.

Observe your surroundings closely. Can you find evidence that an animal has been in your yard? Look for things like tracks, feathers or holes in soil or trees. If you must explore scat to see what it was eating, be sure to use a stick and not your hands. After all, it's still poop.

• **Opossum, Raccoon and Skunk, Oh My!**

<https://mywisconsinwoods.org/2018/02/06/opossum-raccoon-and-skunk-oh-my/>

• **Wildlife Fact Sheets**

<http://wildlifedamage.uwex.edu/>

• **Young Naturalists What Pooped Here?**

[https://files.dnr.state.mn.us/mcvmagazine/young\\_naturalists/young-naturalists-article/scat/janfeb2019\\_young\\_naturalists.pdf](https://files.dnr.state.mn.us/mcvmagazine/young_naturalists/young-naturalists-article/scat/janfeb2019_young_naturalists.pdf)

### List evidence of three animals

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_



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