



# **Learning & Exploring**

*Your community  
and its forest*

## Take a walk

**O**nce you begin learning about the trees in your neighborhood, you will never view trees the same again. Whenever and wherever you walk, your awareness of the forest's distinct qualities and characteristics will grow.

**Directions:** Walk to your front or back yard and notice your trees' distinct characteristics. Choose just one to start. Take note of its height, the shape of its leaves, the texture of its bark, the structure of its branches, its scent, and its colors.

When you are ready, take a walk and look at the trees along your street or in a nearby park. Are there common species?<sup>1</sup> Are there certain trees that stand out for their height, leaf size or branches? As you appreciate specific species and characteristics, ask your neighbors for their opinions. Grow your tree knowledge by sharing your tree discoveries with others.

If you yearn for more facts, try to identify your trees using a tree identification guidebook. If you get stumped, take a small branch to your local nursery or contact the University of California Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners Program.<sup>2</sup> Most importantly, follow your own inspiration. Track the different birds and animals that enjoy your trees. You might keep a journal, create a tree list, take pictures or notice the changes through the four seasons.

<sup>1</sup> See listing of Tree ID Guides in Appendix C

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix B: Helpful Organizations



Areas of Interest:

Fun for Kids, Walking, Looking Around, Writing

Ingredients:

Comfortable shoes, Pen & paper (optional),  
Tree identification guide, Tree journal



## Adopt a tree

**E**very forest is a collection of trees. Old, young, tall short... it's easy to find a favorite. One of the best ways to appreciate your forest's diversity is paying regular attention to one special tree.

**Directions:** Choose a tree holding some unique appeal. It may be an old tree, a colorful tree, an unusual tree or one recently planted. Consider giving it a name. Take steps to provide for its needs. In fact, pamper it. Take time to observe how it changes through the fall and the spring. Note the animals that visit, take nourishment or live in your tree.

Trees planted for special occasions may be some of the best trees to adopt.<sup>1</sup> Marking a child's birth by planting a tree provides an opportunity to take annual pictures of the child with the tree marking their growth. Planting a tree in memory of a loved one or friend who has passed may create a living legacy. Celebrating a marriage, anniversary or retirement with an appropriate tree also creates a lasting memory. A well-planted and cared for tree may be an ongoing reminder of the person or event for decades.

***You don't need  
to know the  
name of a tree  
to love it.***

– John Muir

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A: How to Plant a Tree

Areas of Interest:

Fun for Kids, Looking Around, Physical Labor

Ingredients:

Warm heart, Tree journal, Mature or Young tree



## Ask children to describe a tree

**C**hildren are extraordinary teachers. They call it as they see it. Children often see things adults never notice. Imagine what they see in a tree.

**Directions:** Ask your son or daughter, cousin, grandchild, sister or brother, niece or nephew, neighbor, students or other young person for some of their time and insight. Explain you are in the process of learning about trees and you want their expert perspective. Invite them to walk outside and share one of their favorite trees with you.

Ask your young teacher to share what they like about trees. Inquire why they like specific trees. Invite them to speculate how our lives would be different without trees (resist playing the instructor, at least for a while). Ask the child to write in your tree journal and invite them to start their own.

Once your conversation is over, invite them to join you in discovering another recipe from this Guidebook. Try to engage as many junior arborists as possible.



Areas of Interest: Fun for Kids, Looking Around, Teaching

Ingredients: Patience, Imagination, Curiosity,  
Tree journal



## Learn about your native trees

**N**ative trees are unique. They are a link to past landscapes and are often the best choice to plant today. In most cities the majority of trees are *exotic*, non-native species. Native trees are a crucial piece of local environments for birds, animals and insects. As our neighborhoods grow, groves of native trees continue to disappear.

**Directions:** Visit your local library, nursery, urban forestry organization or the U.C. Cooperative Extension to compile a list of your area's native tree species. Explore designated natural areas, such as the American River Parkway, to find these native varieties. Read about the rich ecosystems in which these trees thrive.<sup>1</sup> Learn the other plants, animals, insects and birds commonly associated with your local trees. Determine which animals *rely* on your native trees. Identify the benefits these trees offered indigenous people, for example: medicines, foods or fiber.

With your new knowledge look for the native trees in your immediate area. Observe what birds, animals and insects are found there. Should you decide to plant a tree, consider planting a native.

**Air darkens,  
air cools And the  
first rain is heard  
in the great elms  
A drop for each  
leaf, before it  
reaches the ground  
I am still alive.**

– John Fuller

<sup>1</sup> An excellent book for Sacramento is The Outdoor World of the Sacramento Region. See Appendix C: Urban & Community Forestry Reading List

Areas of Interest:

Looking Around, Thinking & Investigating, Walking

Ingredients:

Comfortable shoes, Pen & paper.  
Tree identification guides



## Meet your neighbors

**W**e tend to exist among competing beliefs: On one hand, Americans pride themselves on being neighborly, saying hello and offering help during times of need. On the other hand, we firmly believe in the rugged individual who does it alone. Most of us lie somewhere in between. To have communities and local forests thrive, we must build stronger ties with our neighbors. A sense of shared strength, vast knowledge and general camaraderie inevitably spring up as neighbors pull together.

**Directions:** Start noticing when you are most likely to speak to a neighbor. Is it when you get out of your car, pick up the newspaper, walk your dog, borrow a cup of sugar, or when your children play? Whenever it is, try to do a little bit more. Identify several neighbors whom you have not met or who you rarely see. If you feel bold, knock on their door to simply say, "Hello." You might seize an opportunity to strike up a conversation.

Share your interest in trees. Ask how your neighbors feel about their own trees, the neighborhood's trees and your community's overall state. Ask if they have ever planted a tree or if they have a favorite tree in the area.

In general, listen closely to their thoughts, concerns and ideas. Invite them to participate in your efforts, whether it is to appreciate the trees, take part in a planting, help care for a local park, work with local government or join a local tree group. Let your neighbors be the inspiration to keep moving forward!



Areas of Interest:

Networking, Walking

Ingredients:

Firm hand for door knocking and hand shaking, Smile, Ideas to share



## Join your local "Tree Group"<sup>1</sup>

**A**cross America volunteers have built organizations to advocate and care for trees and community forests. These national, state and local groups form an extensive network. They need your support and participation.

**Directions:** Sacramento County residents should contact the Sacramento Tree Foundation.<sup>2</sup> To find a group in your area visit TreeLink at [www.treelink.org](http://www.treelink.org). This web site lists urban and community forestry organizations by state. National organizations such as National Tree Trust, American Forests, the Alliance for Community Trees and the National Arbor Day Foundation have listings by area. If there are no organizations in your immediate area, try the two or three nearest you. They may have names of people in your community interested in your urban forest.

Once you have located a local organization, request information about their current programs, projects and upcoming events. Inquire about membership and ask to be placed on the mailing list.

Get to know your local group by reaching out to their staff and volunteers. Ask if they have trees, educational presentations or other resources available for your community. Invite the executive director to lunch. And when you are ready, consider serving on a committee, volunteering to sit on the board of directors, or providing leadership in some other capacity.

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix B: Helpful Organizations

<sup>2</sup> 916-924-TREE, 201 Lathrop Way, Suite F, Sacramento, CA 95815, [www.sactree.com](http://www.sactree.com).

Areas of Interest:

Technology, Networking, Thinking & Investigating

Ingredients:

Telephone, Computer w/Internet Access

