

Connecting Kids to Nature

Try this activity in a forest—a natural place to learn!

For over 30 years, Project Learning Tree® has used the forest as a “window” to help young people gain an awareness of the world around them and their place within it. Blending a walk in the forest with a fun and engaging PLT activity creates a powerful learning experience for children of all ages. Here’s one idea in a series from PLT that introduces the concept of **species characteristics**.

Activity 64: Looking at Leaves

In this activity, children will take a closer look at leaves and find out more about leaf characteristics and how leaves can be used to identify plants.

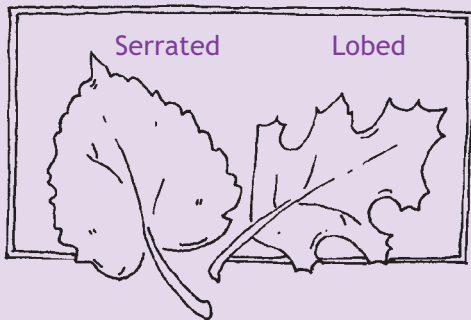
Doing the Activity

The next time you are in a forested area, have children collect leaves of various shapes, sizes, and colors from the ground. Conduct a comparison investigation by asking:

- What differences and similarities can you see?
- What do the leaves feel like? Do they have hairs? Or teeth?
- Can you find the tree that each leaf came from?

Explain that leaves can be used to identify trees. Use a field guide to identify a tree. Find a leaf from that tree, and compare the leaf structure described in the field guide to the real-life specimen you found on the ground. How many other trees can you find with this same type of leaf?

Leaf Margins



Leaf Arrangements



The edges or margins of leaves can provide clues to the tree's identity. Another characteristic to identify a tree is the way its leaves are arranged on the twigs. Even needle leaves grow in patterns. For example, leaves on pines may grow in clusters of two, three, or more.

Have children make prints of the leaves they collect. To make a leaf crayon rubbing, place a leaf on a smooth, hard surface, vein side up, and cover it with a piece of paper. Rub a crayon back and forth across the paper, directly above the leaf. What do you see? The leaf's margin and veins will appear on the paper as you rub.

Materials and directions for making leaf print T-shirts, spatter prints, and pressed leaves can be found in the complete Activity 64: Looking At Leaves from Project Learning Tree's *PreK-8 Environmental Education Activity Guide*.

Discover how PLT can help you teach...from nature!

- Attend a workshop near you to receive PLT activity guides, ideas, and materials.
- Contact your PLT State Coordinator. Visit www.plt.org or call 202-463-2475 for their contact information.

www.plt.org



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