

Connecting Kids to Nature

Nature is a great teacher and getting kids outside to learn and play is good for their brains and their bodies. Try this outdoor activity from Project Learning Tree® - it's safe, fun, and educational!

Trees as Habitats

From their leafy branches to their tangled roots, trees provide a habitat for a host of plants and animals. In this activity, children will inventory the plants and animals that live in, on, and around trees and discover how plants and animals depend on trees in many ways.

Where do you live? A habitat is the place where a plant or animal can get all the things it needs to survive. The next time you pass by a tree, think of it as a habitat, or living space. While observing a tree, have children learn about the different ways plants and animals can find food, water, shelter, and living space by asking:

- What are some plants and animals that depend on trees?
- What do trees provide for these plants and animals?
- Can you see signs of life on the trunk, branches, roots, and leaves? (Have children look on the ground around the tree for fallen leaves, twigs, bark, seeds, fruits, or nuts.)
- How is a tree affected by the plants and animals that live on it? (they may benefit, harm, or be neutral to the tree)

If possible, allow children to use hand lenses or binoculars to get a closer look. Ask them to use their sense of hearing to locate more plants and animals. Finally, compare a tree to your own home, or habitat. How are they alike or different?

Conduct a read-aloud with young children using *Goodnight, Owl!* by Pat Hutchins. For a children's story about how a cactus provides habitat for desert wildlife, check out *Cactus Hotel* by Brenda Guiberson.



Did You Know?

Even snags, or standing dead trees, provide habitat for a number of different species. Tree frogs and beetles live under a snag's bark. Woodpeckers and other birds feed on the insects that live in snags. Chickadees nest in cavities created by woodpeckers. Squirrels and deer mice store food in them.

Make Learning Fun!

Encourage your child's school to incorporate learning outdoors.

For more activity ideas and materials:

- Attend a PLT workshop, www.plt.org/state-network/
- Visit shop.plt.org



Project Learning Tree® (PLT) is an initiative of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative.

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