



Exclusive
Preview

THRIVE
WHERE
YOU'RE
PLANTED

A GUIDED JOURNAL

*to Help You Connect with the
Natural Wonders in Your Neighborhood*

Written by Andrea Debbink

INTRODUCTION

Spring is on its way—slow in some places and fast in others. You have to be outdoors to sense it, or at least near a window where the strengthening sunlight feels a touch warmer than it did at the winter solstice. But for many of us, hibernation can happen too easily this time of year, and nature stays out of reach, as snow, rain, or a late winter malaise keep us cooped up indoors. It can be especially difficult to connect with nature if you live in an urban or suburban location, where plants and animals can be scarce to begin with. As a lifelong city dweller, I know the temptation to think that a wilder world waits beyond the city limits—and in warmer seasons.

Seasons aside, nature can also seem out of reach because of the limited way we define it. In the collective imagination, nature is often a vacation destination, not the fluttering, blooming, unkempt reality that sprouts through pavement and wings its way through superstore parking lots. We revere national parks while overlooking and undervaluing everyday nature—the wild plants, creatures, and worlds thriving in the urban and suburban places where so many of us live.

Yet it's here. Nature's wonders are nearer than most of us realize. A vacant lot can have as much biodiversity as a patch of forest. Some animal species—such as coyotes and gray squirrels—thrive in urban environments year-round. And even on fog-filled February days when time seems static, there are natural cycles and rhythms at work all around us. Every patch of sky, backyard garden, street tree, and wildflower-sprouting median counts as nature, and each is one more way we can experience the natural world if we're willing to step outside.

Thrive Where You're Planted is a guided journal that can help you find peace and joy in the natural wonders that await in ordinary places. It's divided into spring, summer, autumn, and winter, with a chapter for each month. The journal begins with March, but you can start at any point during the year. If you'd like to get started right now, we've created this downloadable version of the February chapter. That way you can save the February chapter that's inside the book for next year.

EACH SEASON INCLUDES THREE MONTH-LONG CHAPTERS THAT CONTAIN THE FOLLOWING SECTIONS

Field Notes: Read an essay on a seasonal nature topic to help ground you in each month.

Discover: This section provides ways to engage more deeply in the season or the natural features of your neighborhood.

Read the Sky: This section includes a weather tracker chart and describes what you can see in the sky each month, including cloud types, constellations, and planets.

Flora and Fauna: This section describes seasonal changes in the plant and animal worlds and provides space for you to record your own observations.

Taste the Wild: This section describes wild edibles that can be foraged throughout North America and includes a table where you can track your discoveries. Although foragers need to take extra precautions in cities, urban foraging is growing in popularity and there are many great resources that can help you in your search.

Bring Nature Near: This section provides practical ideas on how to bring the wild into your everyday life if nature is hard to find where you live.

Notes from My Natural Habitat: Visit the same place in nature each month and record your observations and thoughts in this section.

Be Rooted: Mindfulness involves paying attention to the present moment. Each month, this is where you'll find a brief nature-based mindfulness practice to try.

Poem: Nature has long been the muse of poets, and poetry communicates things about nature that prose can't. Each month ends with a seasonal poem to inspire you, followed by space to write your own.



February

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“The stars awaken a certain reverence,
because though always present, they
are inaccessible.”

–Ralph Waldo Emerson

SEEING STARS (AND PLANETS)

Winter darkness arrives early, a purple dusk seeping into the sky even before the workday ends. After sunset, time seems to contract, dinner collapsing into bedtime. Where I live, this early darkness often keeps people indoors for the night, burrowed like bears in their dens; not many people think of winter evenings as a time to enjoy the outdoors. But if we always spend the year's darker, colder evenings inside, we miss opportunities to see the wonders above us: the moon, planets, and the ancient star patterns telling stories in the sky.

To many creatures, a starry night sky isn't decorative—it's a compass and map. Sea turtle hatchlings use the moon's reflection on the water to find the ocean. The indigo bunting, a vivid blue songbird, relies on the North Star and its nearest constellations to orient itself for its journeys north and south. (It's one of hundreds of bird species that use stars during migration.) Harbor seals find their way around the ocean at night by looking to specific individual stars, called *lodestars*. Even the lowly dung beetle uses the moon and the Milky Way to navigate.

For these reasons and more, dark night skies are a valuable natural resource, but they can be hard to find. In cities, artificial light floods our streets, parking lots, and stadiums, while billboards, homes, and office buildings glow through the night. Light is necessary for modern life, but the excess artificial light of our cities creates light pollution, a phenomenon that wreaks havoc on animal life by eliminating natural darkness and obscuring the stars. Look at the night sky in most cities and you'll see a dull haze where the stars should be: a disappearing act of our own creation.

But solutions are at hand. Light pollution is caused by the overuse and misuse of artificial light. Think of billboards that flash all night or streetlights

that radiate light in all directions instead of focusing it only on the ground where it's needed. Since the 1980s, the International Dark-Sky Association, a nonprofit founded by two astronomers, has been educating the public about the hazards of light pollution and the ways that communities and individuals can be part of the solution. Some actions are simple, like closing curtains at night to keep light indoors or using timers and motion sensors to limit outdoor lighting. Other solutions, like city ordinances, take more collaboration and public support.

But we don't need to wait until light pollution is solved before we can explore the night sky. In fact, maybe learning basic astronomy can help us understand why the issue of light pollution is so important. To start, we need to expand our sky search to include celestial objects that can be more easily seen in cities, like the moon, planets, star clusters, satellites, even the International Space Station (which looks a bit like a star itself). Unlike our ancestors and animal neighbors, we no longer need the moon, stars, and planets to find our way. But maybe we need them for something else.

Orion was the first constellation I learned to see as a child, tracing its diamond studs in the velvet blue as my breath formed frosty clouds. My dad pointed out the constellation one winter night in a parking lot. We weren't "stargazing," only walking to our car. It was the first time I realized there were pictures in the sky, spinning above our heads, a connection with stargazers of the past and present. Even as an adult, when I catch a glimpse of Orion on my evening commute, stretched low along the southwest horizon, I feel awe and a sense of connection. And maybe this is what we need most in winter, as we find our way through the year's shortest days and longest nights.



Even if stars are difficult to see amid your neighborhood's light pollution, there are still reasons to look skyward. Here are some celestial sights to seek out this month:

Planets

To our eyes, planets look like particularly bright stars, making it possible to see them even when there's light pollution. There are five planets that can be seen with the unaided eye (for the rest, you'll need a high-powered telescope): Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. Each planet's visibility depends on its orbit, so use an app or website to tell you when it'll be in view.

The Pleiades

The Pleiades, a star cluster that's also known as the Seven Sisters, is visible from many cities and can only be seen from November to April in the northern hemisphere. With the unaided eye, most people can pick out between five and seven of these celestial "sisters," but you can use binoculars to see even more. There are more than 3,000 stars in this legendary star cluster.

Orion

Constellations can be tough to see in cities, but when conditions are right, the largest and brightest of these sky pictures emerge. With his sword and diamond-studded belt, Orion is one of the brightest and most recognizable constellations in the winter sky. Named for a famed hunter in Greek mythology, Orion is visible in the northern hemisphere during winter evenings (look to the southwest sky) and isn't visible at all in the summer.

International Space Station

If you like stargazing but want a more dependable celestial object, track the International Space Station (ISS). It appears in the sky like a tiny dim star, moving along a straight path like a satellite. Even better, NASA has a website that tracks when and where the ISS will be passing overhead so you'll know when to watch for it. Find it at spotthestation.nasa.gov.

If you manage to see any of these celestial sights this month,
record your experience below.

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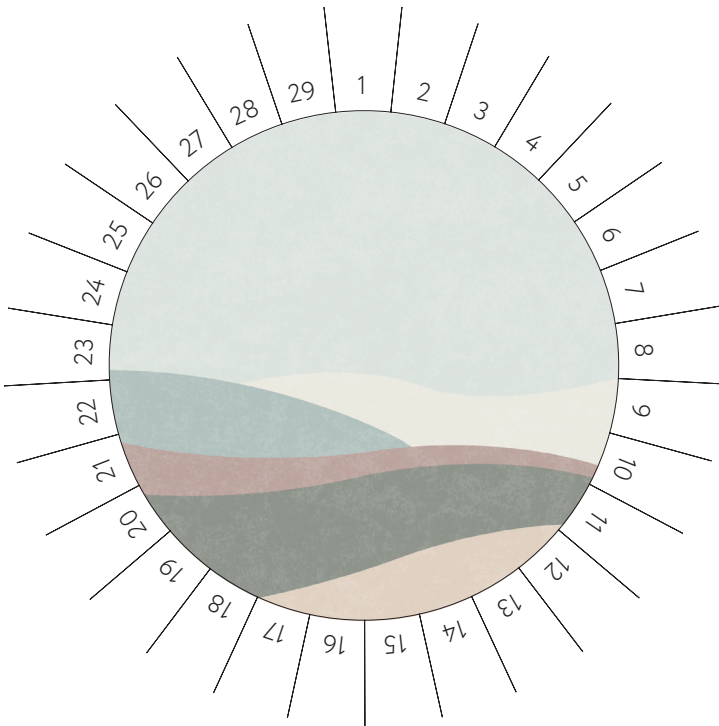
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WEATHER TRACKER

Use the following chart to keep track of weather phenomena this month. First, create a key by coloring in the dots at the bottom of the page, using a different color for each circle. Then use this color-coded system to record each day's weather. Many days will have more than one type of weather.



SUNNY



CLOUDY



PARTLY CLOUDY



WINDY



RAINY



STORMY



SNOWY



FOGGY



PILLARS OF LIGHT

It's called "diamond dust," ice crystals so sparkly and small they could be crushed gemstones. At sunrise and sunset, diamond dust can create a sun pillar, a vertical beam of light that shines upward from the sun. While sun pillars are somewhat rare, you can increase your chances of seeing one. This month, if you live in a place with cold winter weather, watch the sunrise or sunset on a day when you can see thin, wispy clouds, known as cirrus clouds, near the sun.

Full Moon

Write down the date of this month's full moon and the time when it will rise so that you can observe it.

Date: _____ Time: _____

New Moon

Write down when the new moon occurs this month so you'll know the best time for stargazing.

Date: _____

Venus

Venus is Earth's nearest neighbor and the brightest object in the sky after the sun and the moon. Depending on Venus's orbit, it's usually visible throughout the year shortly after sunset or shortly before sunrise. For about two months of its nineteen-month cycle, however, Venus becomes invisible to our eyes as it passes either in front of or behind the sun.

Microclimates are hidden worlds; they're small patches of habitat where the climate and growing conditions are different from the surrounding landscape. They may have more sun or shade or be wetter or drier. Because of these differences, a microclimate can have unique plant species and its seasonal cycles may be shorter or longer. Think of a south-facing yard that's the first to sprout flowers in spring, or a shady hollow in the woods where ferns and moss grow. Are there any microclimates where you live? Visit one of them this month and record any plant life you see.

Plant name or description	Date spotted	Place spotted

fauna

Microclimates not only produce unique plant life, they can also be home to animals that aren't found in the surrounding area. (There's a warm and dry microclimate along one of my local rivers that mimics desert conditions. It's the only midwestern place I know where cactuses grow and tortoises roam—proof that microclimates can surprise you.) As you explore local microclimates this month, look for signs of animal life. Record any signs of animal life (or animals themselves) and the dates you spot them.

Creature/ sign of life	Date spotted	Place spotted	Activity (if applicable)



DRINK IN THE WILD AIR

Sometimes getting close to nature is as simple as cracking open a window or stepping outside. This time of year, many people close their windows against the winter weather. But shutting out the cold and wind also means shutting out fresh air. And outdoor air is good for us, even in cities. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, indoor air can be two to five times more polluted than outdoor air. Whereas causes of outdoor air pollution can be easy to recognize, sources of indoor air pollution are more subtle. Cooking with gas and using commonplace household products like cleansers, air fresheners, and candles all work together to compromise the air quality inside our homes. And since most heating and cooling systems don't bring in fresh air, opening a window is the easiest way to introduce it. We also tend to breathe differently when exposed to outside air, taking deeper breaths that bring more oxygen into our bodies. This month, take a five-minute breather every day for one week, either near an open window or outside. See if you can notice any positive effects. Write about them on page 201.



A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing, spanning the width of the page.



Location:

Date & Time:

Weather & Temperature:

5 Things I See:

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3 Things I Hear:

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1 Thing I Smell:

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1 Thing I Feel:

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REMEMBER AND REFLECT

Nature has a way of leaving an impression on us. Sometimes it's a beautiful sight like snow-covered mountains or an orchard in bloom. Or it could be a powerful experience like watching a thunderstorm roll in from the ocean or seeing the Milky Way for the first time. For this month's mindfulness activity, recall a favorite nature memory. Sit quietly, eyes closed, for three to five minutes and visualize the memory the best you can. Try to remember sensory details. Imagine the smells, sounds, and sights of this place. Afterward, remember that you can use your imagination to return to this place when you need a mental break.



February Twilight

by Sara Teasdale

I stood beside a hill
Smooth with new-laid snow.
A single star looked out
From the cold evening glow.

There was no other creature
That saw what I could see—
I stood and watched the evening star
As long as it watched me.



Think about the ways you've experienced nature this month.
Pick an experience or something you observed and use it to
inspire your own poem below.

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conclusion

I hope this guided journal has made you feel more at home in your natural habitat and helped you see that no matter where you live, nature is near. Some days you might connect to the outside world one fragment at a time: glimpsing a cloud overhead, hearing a few notes of a sparrow's song, catching the scent of water, or feeling the sunlight on your skin. But I hope you'll continue to have slower, more intentional outdoor experiences too, like relaxing in the grass, learning the names of plants, and watching the moon rise on an autumn evening. Because in the end, like the grass and the sparrows and the moon, you too are a part of nature. And now that you've found your place in it, may you return again and again.



FOR HIKING AND EXPLORING

AllTrails app (iOS and Android): Includes local trail maps for hiking, biking, camping, and backpacking

FOR STARGAZING

Night Sky app (iOS)

Star Walk 2 app (iOS and Android)

FOR IDENTIFYING PLANTS

Seek app (iOS and Android): Best for quick plant IDs; also facilitates animal IDs

iNaturalist app (iOS and Android): Best for more dedicated naturalists who want to connect with others and share data

Plant Snap app (iOS and Android)

National Geographic Pocket Guide to Wildflowers of North America

by Catherine H. Howell (National Geographic, 2014)

Smithsonian Nature Guide: Trees by Tony Russell (DK, 2012)

FOR IDENTIFYING ANIMALS

Seek app (iOS and Android): Best for quick animal IDs; also facilitates plant IDs

iNaturalist app (iOS and Android): Best for more dedicated naturalists who want to connect with others and share data

National Geographic Pocket Guide to Mammals of North America

by Catherine H. Howell (National Geographic, 2016)

Merlin Bird ID app (iOS and Android)

Audubon Guide to North American Birds: audubon.org/bird-guide

Peterson Field Guide to Birds of North America

by Roger Tory Peterson (Mariner Books, 2020)

FOR LEARNING ABOUT FORAGING AND WILD EDIBLES

Urban Foraging: Find, Gather, and Cook 50 Wild Plants by Lisa M. Rose with photography by Miriam Doan (Timber Press, 2022)

Falling Fruit: A massive, collaborative map of the urban harvest, searchable by address; fallingfruit.org

Alan Bergo: foragerchef.com

Alexis Nikole Nelson: @alexisnikole on TikTok; @blackforager on Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter