

TWELVE DAYS OF NATURE

By Debbie Rhoades, Frederick County Master Gardener, December, 2023

Have you ever had a day that was so perfect that you wished you could put it in a jar to take out and experience again? What were these special moments... watching tadpoles turn into frogs, splashing in mud puddles in the spring; catching fireflies, climbing trees in summer; picking berries, hearing the call of a songbird at dawn, watching the sunrise or sunset in fall; making snow angels in winter?

Add to those memories this year by scheduling some unique gifts for Christmas, Kwanzaa, or other special holidays with family and friends. Think outside the box—or jar—and use your creativity to celebrate the “12 Days of Nature” and get everyone outside. All you need is a one-quart jar or a box with a lid and 12 pieces of heavy paper or cardboard. Even plain 3” x 5” notecards will do. You can get fancy and decorate each card with stickers, glitter, artwork, etc.

On each card, write down an activity you can do with someone special. You might want to check the Frederick County Master Gardeners’ calendar, too, for some of our special events throughout the year.

Here are some suggestions to get you started. Most are free or cost little.

1. Take the Baker Park Tree Walk. Download the map from the Frederick Forestry Board for the locations of 28 unique trees, both native and nonnative, in and near Baker Park. The web site’s “Nature Notes” gives you pictures of the trees as well as interesting information about each tree.
2. Bundle up in winter coats for a trip to Catoctin Mountain Park, run by the National Park Service, near Thurmont, Maryland. Every March, park staff demonstrate the traditional way of boiling sap from maple trees to make syrup at the annual Maple Syrup Festival. While you’re there, listen to blue grass music and take a hayride through the maple grove.
3. Go hiking at the many county, state, and national parks in Frederick County any time of year. Check out Chris Hough’s article, *Take a Hike! 10 Destinations in Frederick County for Hiking Enthusiasts*, at the Visit Frederick website.
4. Visit the Children’s Garden at the University of Maryland Extension Office, 330 Montevue Lane, Frederick. “Storytime in the Garden” is held at 10:00 a.m. the first Wednesday of the month, weather permitting, from June through September.
5. Rent a 12’ x 12’ garden plot at Ballenger Creek Park; everyone in the family can help choose what to plant and how to take care of your new garden. Plots can be accessed March through October, 8:00 a.m. to sunset. For details, visit <https://www.recreator.com/196/Community-Gardens>. Plots go fast, so act now to reserve your space for 2024.
6. Plant a tree together and the state will even supply a rebate of \$25 if it’s native. The Department of Natural Resources has partnered with selected nurseries. To get your rebate coupon, visit <https://dnr.maryland.gov/forests/Pages/MarylandersPlantTrees/Introduction.aspx>. Choose from 40 varieties, large and small, evergreen and deciduous. Someday, another generation may be climbing that tree!

7. Visit a nature center in the county – Fountain Rock or Catoctin Creek.
8. Pick pumpkins at a local Frederick County farm. Which one? **Homegrown Frederick** publishes an annual guide at <https://www.homegrownfrederick.com/>.
9. Take a trip to the National Arboretum in Washington, DC. The outside grounds are open every day to the public from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. every day except Christmas. Admission is free. Check out the government’s Calendar of Events for many more suggested experiences (<https://www.usna.usda.gov/visit/calendar-of-events/>).
10. Take a trip to Brookside Gardens in Montgomery County. Admission to the gardens is free. The award-winning 50-acre public display gardens include the Aquatic Garden, Azalea Garden, Butterfly Garden, Children’s Garden, Rose Garden, Japanese Style Garden, Trial Garden, Rain Garden, and the Woodland Walk. The Formal Gardens include a Perennial Garden, Yew Garden, the Maple Terrace, and Fragrance Garden. During the holidays Brookside offers a winter wonderland with the Garden of Lights display. This event requires a ticket, so check the website before going.
11. Create special memories for everyone by picking out a real, live Christmas tree at one of the many tree farms in Frederick County. The Maryland Christmas Tree Association has a list at <https://www.marylandchristmastrees.org/fredrick-county> . Homegrown Frederick is another resource.
12. What nature activity strikes your fancy?

What kids remember are the times you spent together, so forget the fancy packages and get outside...nature is calling!



The non-native **corkscrew willow** (*Salix matsudana*) can be found along the Carroll Creek walking trail in Baker Park. Like other members of the *Salix* genus, the corkscrew willow contains salicylic acid, a precursor to aspirin; however, our native North American white willow (*Salix alba*) actually has a much higher amount of salicylic acid.

[Photo courtesy of Maritta Perry Grau, Master Gardener]

On a Baker Park Tree Walk, several Frederick County master gardeners inspect the non-native **corkscrew willow** (*Salix matsudana*).

[Photo courtesy of Maritta Perry Grau, Master Gardener]





The non-native **London Plane** (*Platanus X acerifolia*) is often confused with our native sycamore. It is actually a hybrid of our native sycamore and the Asian plane tree. The London planes, with a creamy to gray bark, are very long-lived and grow to be quite large. They can be distinguished from our sycamore by their shiny, deeply lobed leaves and often have two seed balls on a single stem. [*Photo courtesy of Maritta Perry Grau, Master Gardener*]

Nature is calling

Here are a few web sites that can give you and yours more ideas for outdoor activities:

Frederick County Forestry Board: <https://frederick.forestryboard.org>

Catoctin Mountain Park: <https://www.nps.gov/cato/planyourvisit/calendar.htm>

Visit Frederick: <https://www.visitfrederick.org>

Also check our website or Facebook for upcoming free seminars, Master Gardener certification classes, as well as other announcements. For more information about the Frederick County Extension Master Gardener/Horticulture Program, gardening information and advice visit:

<http://extension.umd.edu/frederick-county/home-gardening> or call Susan Trice at the University of Maryland Extension Frederick County office, 301-600-1596. Find us on Facebook at

<http://www.facebook.com/mastergardenersfrederickcountymaryland> .

UME Home & Garden Information Center, <https://extension.umd.edu/programs/environmentnatural-resources/program-areas/home-and-garden-information-center> .

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