

April 2023

WILD KIDS

SEASONAL NATURE EDUCATION FOR KIDS & THEIR GROWN UPS

April
Wild Prompts

Morels &
Shaggy Mane
Mushrooms

Spring Foraging
Game Cards

April
Phenology
Calendar

April
Night Sky
Wheel

Seasonal poems,
activities, nature
journal pages &
more

From the editor

BY ALICIA BAYER

Hello April!

What is the weather like where you live right now?
What are you hoping to do outside this month?

Here in Minnesota we usually have all kinds of weather in April! Sometimes it is really hot and we also often still get a lot of snow.

This month we'll probably do our first spring foraging of the year, since it has been really, really snowy here this year and the ground has been covered up with many feet of snow. We'll probably forage early spring plants like ramps, nettles and garlic mustard as the ground thaws. In lots of other areas, people are already foraging morel mushrooms and other tasty plants like wild asparagus and violets that we'll have to wait a bit for.

Our kids like to watch meteor showers and other nighttime excitement, and this month we'll try to catch the Lyrids meteor showers. Our teenage son Alex also really likes to watch lightning storms this time of year -- we sit on our balcony and watch the sky over distant towns so we get the show without getting wet or being in any risk. It's a fun way to hang out together!

What are you hoping to do in nature this month? I hope you have a wild, wonderful time!

Alicia



Why is Wild Kids free?

Kids (and their grown ups) need nature, and nature needs us! Our family believes in the importance of sharing & helping each other, and of passing on skills to help our world and each other. As long as we are able, we plan to produce Wild Kids to help do this for families who find it useful.

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Find lots more links, information and fun to accompany this month's themes at www.magicalchildhood.com/wildkids.

Go Wild in April!

10 WAYS TO PLAY & LEARN WITH NATURE THIS MONTH

Play "I Have, Who Has?" and learn spring foraging plants (we have game cards in this issue)

Get a jar from the recycling & start a collection of this season's pretty rocks or shells

Go someplace very dark (away from bright cities) late at night and watch the Lyrids Meteor Shower, which peaks on April 22 & 23.

Go for a walk in the rain (and stomp in some puddles, no matter how old you are!)

Start a leaf collection (real pressed leaves or with your camera) of leaves you can ID in your neighborhood

Find some dried vines like grapevine or Virginia Creeper and weave a crown or wreath

Practice skipping stones across water (flat stones work better)

Put out bird seed every morning and sit quietly outside -- see how close the birds will let you get over time

Try to get outside barefoot every day this month, even for just a minute

See how many of our April Wild Prompts you can do this month

*** Or if you're in Australia, Phillipines or elsewhere in that part of the world, watch the hybrid solar eclipse on April 20!

I HAVE, WHO HAS: Spring Foraging



To Play:

Print out the cards on the following pages (use card stock if you want them to be more durable) and cut them out.

Hand out the cards to all players. If you have a lot of players you can have one card each or players can have more than one card.

Have someone start by reading off what they have and what they're looking for. Whoever has the next plant calls out "I have... Who has...". Go around until you've found all the wild plants.

Try to get through the cards as fast as possible, so you learn to recognize the wild plants. Shuffle them and hand them out again each time and see how fast you can get through the stack.

To play with one or two players:

Hide all of the cards except the first card. Race around and try to find the card you need next.

If you like, set a timer and try to do it in your fastest time.

I HAVE, WHO HAS: Spring Foraging

I have



ramps

Who has



black locust flowers

I have



chickweed

Who has



violets

I have



morels

Who has



miner's lettuce

I have



wood sorrel

Who has



nettles

I HAVE, WHO HAS: Spring Foraging

I have



nettles

Who has



dandelions

I have



pheasant back mushrooms

Who has



ramps

I have



violets

Who has



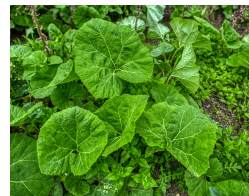
fiddlehead ferns

I have



garlic mustard

Who has



burdock

I HAVE, WHO HAS: Spring Foraging

I have



lambs quarters

Who has



spruce tips

I have



dandelions

Who has



morels

I have



black locust flowers

Who has



garlic mustard

I have



wild asparagus

Who has



pheasant back mushrooms

I HAVE, WHO HAS: Spring Foraging

I have



spruce tips

Who has



wild asparagus

I have



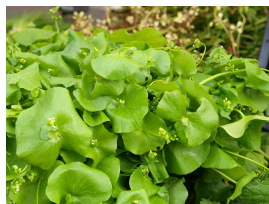
burdock

Who has



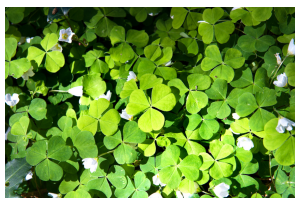
chickweed

I have



miner's lettuce

Who has



wood sorrel

I have



fiddlehead ferns

Who has



lambs quarters

April Wild Prompts!

- 1 Take a silly photo outside
- 2 Climb something
- 3 Whistle with a blade of grass
- 4 Try to spot 5 kinds of birds
- 5 ID and sketch a weed
- 6 Find a feather
- 7 Collect cool rocks in 5 colors
- 8 Go for a walk for over a mile
- 9 Balance on something outside
- 10 Take a photo from up high
- 11 Find 3 edible plants in your neighborhood
- 12 Get some rocks and mark how far you can jump
- 13 Make a design out of nature items
- 14 Find a walking stick & decorate it
- 15 Spin around 10 times & then try to walk a straight line
- 16 Go to a park
- 17 Do something really messy outside
- 18 Photograph 5 tiny things in nature
- 19 Take a photo in the reflection of water
- 20 Take apart a plant like a daffodil or mushroom
- 21 Pot up a young weed and try to keep it inside as a houseplant
- 22 Pick up litter
- 23 Run as fast as you can
- 24 Do art or play an instrument outside
- 25 Take a picture from really low
- 26 Lie down and look at the clouds
- 27 Plant some seeds (even from your groceries!)
- 28 Go on a walk in the evening
- 29 Take a photo in the reflection of water
- 30 Forage something to eat in a sandwich or salad



MOREL

(Morchella spp.)



Morels are a lot of people's favorite wild mushrooms. Even people who don't like other mushrooms tend to love morels! They are common and grow all over the world, although they can be tricky to find.

Morels come up in the spring, when daytime temperatures are in the 60's (Fahrenheit) or so, and nighttime temps are in the 40's or so. They like to pop up when there's been some rain, and they usually appear around the same time the first dandelions are blooming.

It's called phenology when you study when things happen at the same time in nature, and it can be a really helpful way to forage. It's hard to say when things will bloom or fruit by a certain date because weather changes from year to year, but if you learn to look for other things that happen around the same time then you know what other things are likely to be happening. We always look for wild asparagus when the lilacs bloom, for instance. That's one reason we have phenology calendars in each issue of Wild Kids -- it's a great way to start to know what's going to be happening in nature where you live and to find patterns.

Morels have a honeycomb appearance to their caps and a pointy top. The caps and stems are hollow. They range in color from yellow-beige to brown to black.



Look for them on the ground in sunny patches around trees and water. They especially love to grow where there were fires in recent years. They blend in with things like dried leaves and can be very hard to spot! Our kids always compete to see who finds the most.

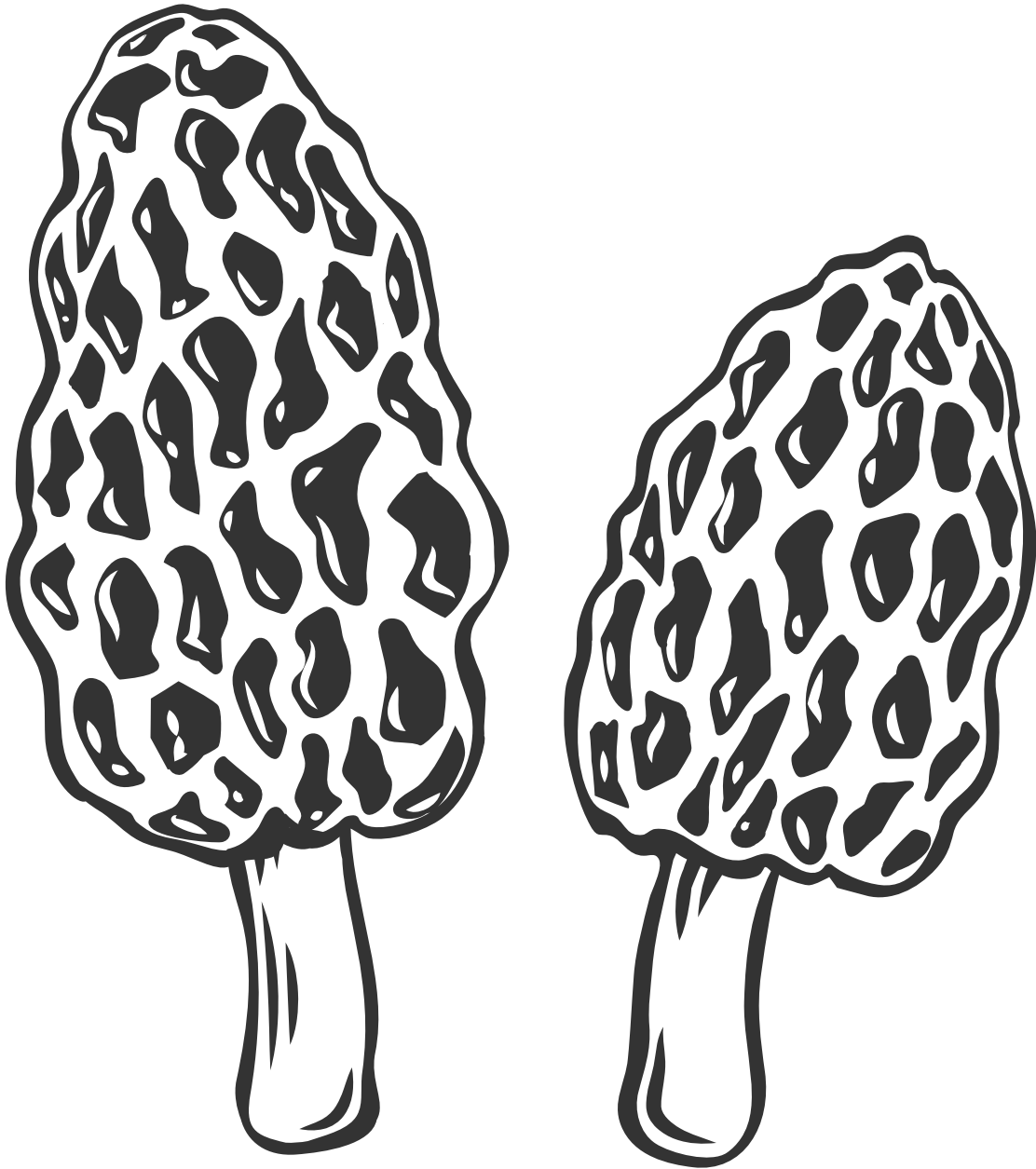
How do you eat them? Be sure you cook them! Don't eat morels raw. We slice them in half length ways and soak them in a bit of warm water with salt added. That way we can be sure they have a hollow stem and cap, and it will get rid of the occasional bug who might have been hiding inside. Then you can saute them in oil or butter, or even put them on pizza or in casseroles. Our family's favorite way of eating morels is to dip them in batter and fry them. There are never enough for our kids!



The closest thing to toxic lookalikes are false morels (various species). None of them have hollow caps though. That's one reason we always cut open our morels. Also, true morels are only found in spring and have pits in the caps instead of folds. If you gather morels, research the lookalikes well before eating any! Once you learn them well it's easy to be sure.

MOREL

(*Morchella* spp.)



SHAGGY MANE MUSHROOMS

(*Coprinus comatus*)

Shaggy mane mushrooms are considered one of the "foolproof four" wild mushrooms to forage because they are so easy to identify and there are no toxic lookalikes! (The other three are morels, chicken of the woods, and giant puffballs.)

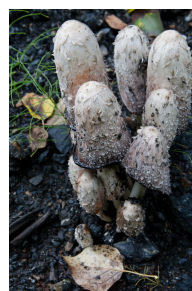
They're also kind of fun looking, don't you think?

They used to be called "lawyer's wigs" because they look like the wigs that lawyers used to wear in courtrooms!

They are whitish with upturned scales that can be gray or brown. They are very fragile mushrooms and must be cooked and eaten very quickly after you forage them.

Once they start to degrade (age and fall apart), they turn into something equally cool! That's when they are called "inky cap" mushrooms and they are often used as a natural ink or food dye at that point (there are other ink cap mushrooms too). Careful as they'll even stain your hands black then!

Shaggy manes grow all year long in temperate places and they're pretty common. They tend to like disturbed areas like paths, lawns and wood chip piles. Remember if you forage in places like this there could be pesticides or other contaminants, which is one reason you might want to use them for ink experiments instead!



SHAGGY MANE

(*Coprinus comatus*)



April Poetry

"Snow in April is abominable," said Anne. "Like a slap in the face when you expected a kiss."
~ L.M. Montgomery, *Anne of Ingleside*

THE SPRING

By Rose Fyleman

A little mountain spring I found
That fell into a pool;
I made my hands into a cup
And caught the sparkling water up—
It tasted fresh and cool.

A solemn little frog I spied
Upon the rocky brim;
He looked so boldly in my face,
I'm certain that he thought the place
Belonged by rights to him.

Mice

By Rose Fyleman

I think mice
Are rather nice.
Their tails are long,
Their faces small,
They haven't any
Chins at all.
Their ears are pink,
Their teeth are white,
They run about
The house at night.
They nibble things
They shouldn't touch
And no one seems
To like them much
But I think mice
Are nice



THE WEST WIND

It's a warm wind, the west wind, full of birds' cries;
I never hear the west wind but tears are in my eyes.
For it comes from the west lands, the old brown hills,
And April's in the west wind, and daffodils.

It's a fine land, the west land, for hearts as tired as mine,
Apple orchards blossom there, and the air's like wine.
There is cool green grass there, where men may lie at rest,
And the thrushes are in song there, fluting from the nest.

"Will you not come home, brother? You have been long away.
It's April, and blossom time, and white is the spray:
And bright is the sun, brother, and warm is the rain,
Will you not come home, brother, home to us again?"

The young corn is green, brother, where the rabbits run;
It's blue sky, and white clouds, and warm rain and sun.
It's song to a man's soul, brother, fire to a man's brain,
To hear the wild bees and see the merry spring again.

Larks are singing in the west, brother, above the green wheat,
So will you not come home, brother, and rest your tired feet?
I've a balm for bruised hearts, brother, sleep for aching eyes,"
Says the warm wind, the west wind, full of birds' cries.

It's the white road westwards is the road I must tread
To the green grass, the cool grass, and rest for heart and head,
To the violets and the brown brooks and the thrushes' song
In the fine land, the west land, the land where I belong.

JOHN MASEFIELD



My Nature Journal

April



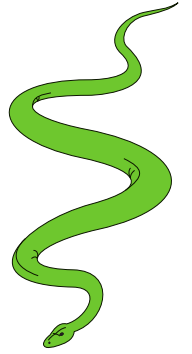
APRIL 2023

Phenology Calendar

Keep track of all of the nature firsts or memorable weather that you see this month!
You can write them in that day's square or draw a picture.

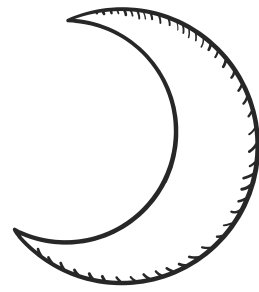
Here are some examples.

- First dragonflies seen
- Mourning cloak butterfly spotted
- First ladybug spotted
- Spring peepers (frogs) heard
- First earthworms spotted
- Ducks nesting
- Sleet
- Wild ginger emerging
- First garter snake spotted
- Eastern meadowlark spotted
- First trillium in bloom
- Choke cherries blooming
- Red winged blackbirds heard
- 80 degree high temp
- Big storm with trees down
- 3 inches snow

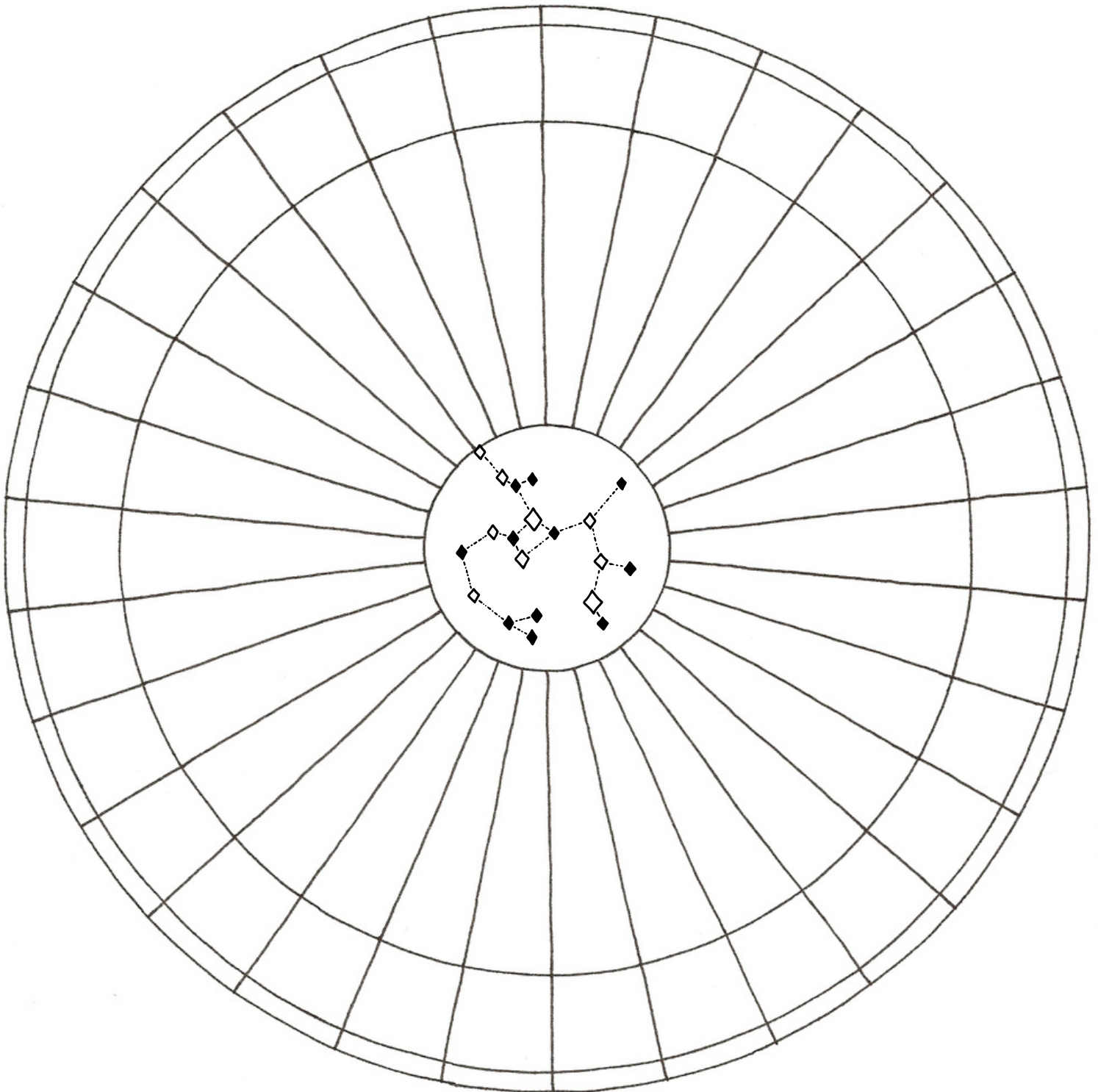


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2	3	4	5	6	7	8
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23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						

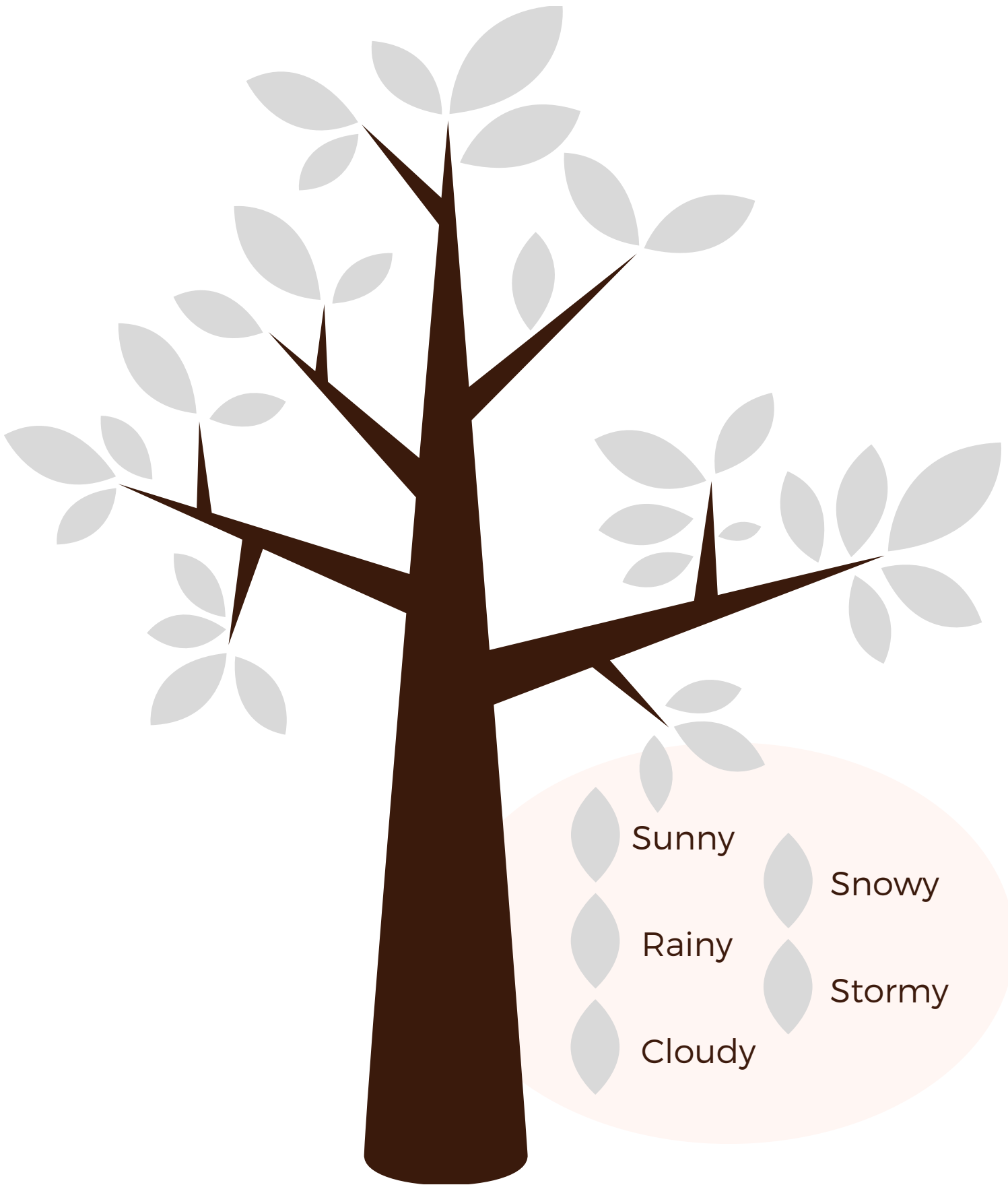
April Night Skies



Each night this month, look out the window or head outside and look at the sky. Then draw or color a square on the wheel to show what it looked like. Was there a full moon or a crescent? Could you see stars? Was there lightning? Did you get to watch a meteor shower or spot one of the planets that's especially bright this month like Venus? Or was it all dark from cloud cover? At the end of the month you'll have a visual memory of the whole month's nights! Visit earthsky.org to learn more about what to look for this month in the night sky.



April Weather Tree



Sunny

Snowy

Rainy

Stormy

Cloudy

April Bird List

Birds spotted this month

April Animal List

Mammals, reptiles & other wildlife spotted this month

April Nature Notes

Record any interesting discoveries here -- plants you identify, foods you forage, outdoor activities, cool nature projects, nature books read, or just notes about what it's like outside this week!

Week 1 Observations

Week 2 Observations

Week 3 Observations

Week 4 Observations

MY FORAGING GUIDE FOR:

GENERAL SKETCH OF THE PLANT

CLOSE-UP SKETCHES OF PLANT PARTS

LATIN NAME _____

WHERE FOUND _____

PARTS USED _____

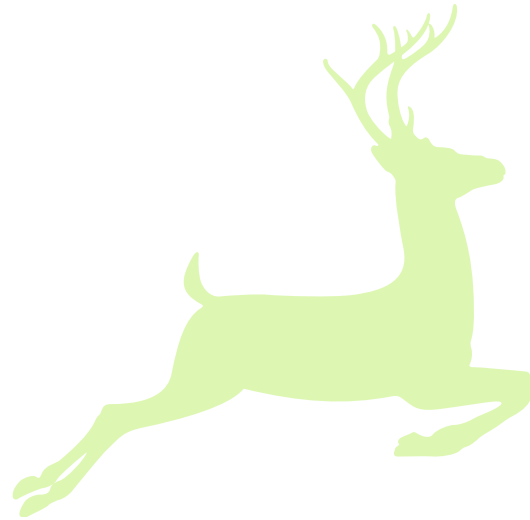
LOOKALIKES & HOW TO POSITIVELY ID:

WARNINGS: _____

FORAGING RECORD (DATES, WHERE FOUND, HOW IT WAS USED)

MY RATING FOR THIS PLANT





Want to see your stuff in Wild Kids?

We welcome articles, photos, artwork and other submissions from kids and their grown ups.

Visit magicalchildhood.com/wildkids to learn more

or email photographs, artwork, letters or other submissions to alicia.bayer@gmail.com