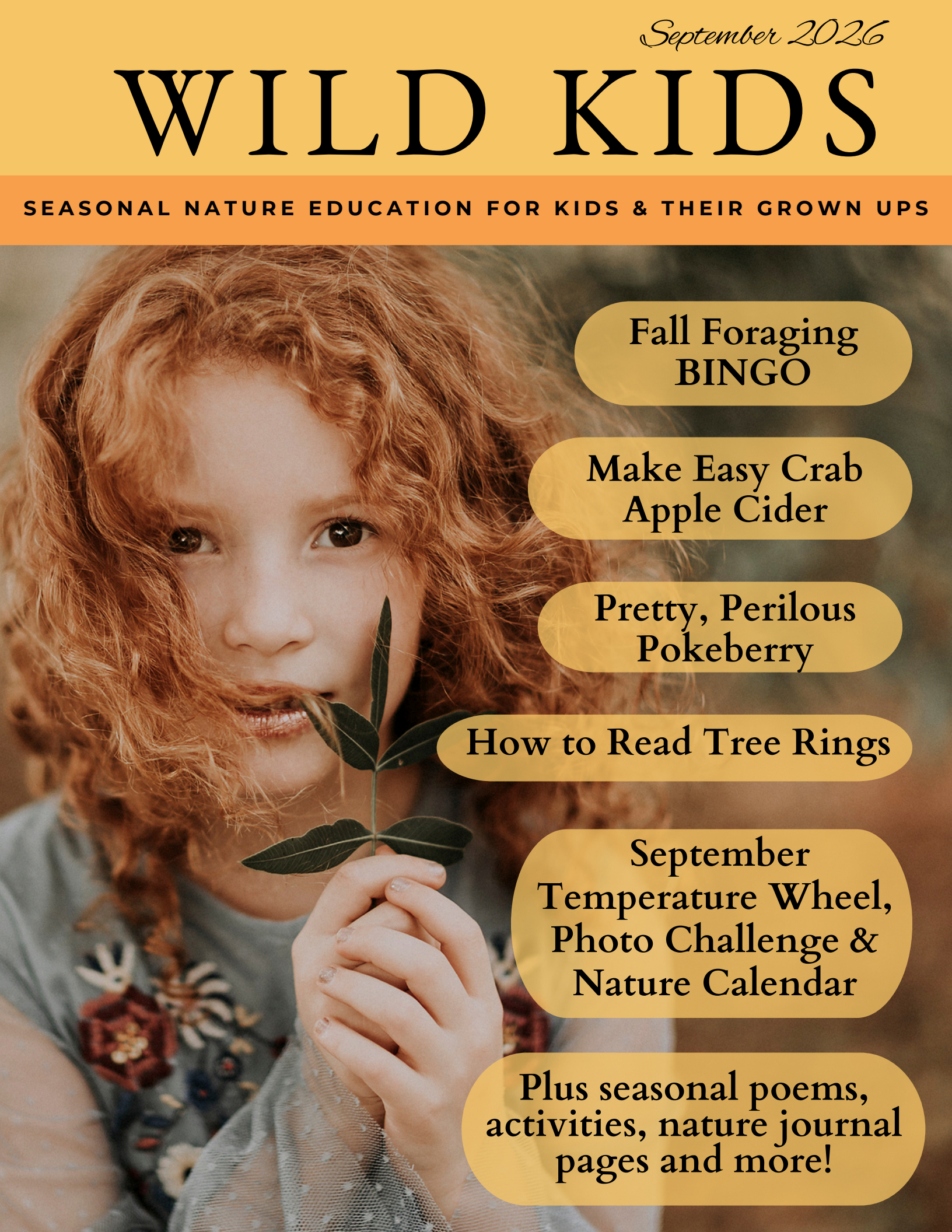


September 2026

WILD KIDS

SEASONAL NATURE EDUCATION FOR KIDS & THEIR GROWN UPS



Fall Foraging
BINGO

Make Easy Crab
Apple Cider

Pretty, Perilous
Pokeberry

How to Read Tree Rings

September
Temperature Wheel,
Photo Challenge &
Nature Calendar

Plus seasonal poems,
activities, nature journal
pages and more!

From the editor

BY ALICIA BAYER

Welcome September!

"September is the month of winds and magic."

My husband Daryl read that quote in a book many years ago. I've never been able to find out who wrote it. When he was growing up, Daryl read thousands of books and most of them are out of print now. I am thankful for that author of long ago, though, because it's one of my favorite quotes and I always think of it in September.

What do you like to do in September? When I was a kid, we moved every year and school always started in September. Being a new kid every year was not very fun and I didn't really like September at all. I didn't get to spend very much time in nature back then either, so I missed out on wonderful outdoor things that I could have done in all the states I lived in like California, Maine and Arkansas.

Now that I'm grown with my own kids, I consider September a really fun month! Here in Minnesota, we usually still have lots of warm days to spend at the lake (Minnesota has a lot of lakes!), and we also like to go hiking, bike riding, foraging, boating, rock hunting and bird watching, plus lots more.

Some of the things we forage in September are acorns, hawthorn berries (also known as haws), pokeberries for ink and dye (not to eat!), walnuts, wild grapes, staghorn sumac berries (the fuzzy red ones for spice and wild lemonade), rose hips, apples, pears, crab apples, dandelion roots, catmint and other wild mints, the last of the elderberries, and wonderful fall mushrooms like lion's mane and oyster mushrooms, among other things.

I hope you find lots of fun wild adventures this month, and that September is very magical wherever you are!

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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Contact: alicia.bayer@gmail.com

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

Go Wild in September

10 WAYS TO PLAY & LEARN WITH NATURE THIS MONTH

Look for the full moon the evening of September 26

Repurpose a photo album for a fall leaf and pressed flower collection

Stargaze in the back yard on a blanket with hot cocoa

Forage some pokeweed berries to use for pretty magenta dye or ink (don't eat – they're toxic)

Gather and label seeds for next year's gardens from veggies you grew and native flowers

Pot up a pretty weed from your yard or nature and bring it inside for a houseplant over the fall and winter

Gather some tasty edible leaves like wild mint or lemon balm to dry & crush to make a herbal sugar mix for tea

Make easy & delicious crab apple cider (we have directions in this issue)

Make a fall leaf nature crown by folding leaves around a length of double sided tape



Celebrate the fall equinox when day and night are equal length and fall starts (or spring in the Southern Hemisphere) on September 22

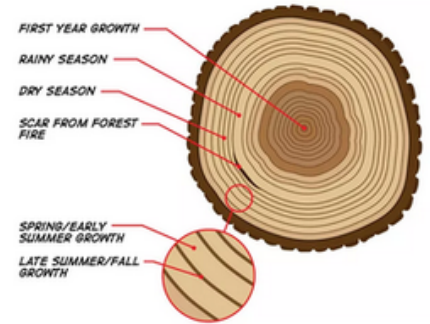




How to read Tree Rings

The rings in a tree's trunk tell how old the tree is, but they also tell all kinds of other things!

Each year that a tree lives, it forms new bark and a new ring is formed. In the spring, it grows very fast with large cells and the ring will usually look lighter. In the summer, it grows more slowly and the ring will look darker.



The pattern inside a tree can provide a snapshot of past climate conditions.

Science Education Resource Center, Carleton College

Each pair of light and dark rings make up one year of life for the tree.

Here is a cross section of a giant redwood tree in California, with rings marked with historical events that happened during its lifetime.

The tree was 1,021 years old when it fell in 1930!



The oldest rings are in the middle of the tree, in the darker middle that is called heartwood. The heartwood part of the tree is dead and filled with sap. It supports the tree and keeps it strong. The outer part is called sapwood and is still alive. It brings water up from the roots to the leaves.

When there is a lot of rainfall that year, the tree will grow more and the ring will be bigger. In years with drought and not very much rain, the rings will be very narrow. The rings can also be narrow when there were a lot of other trees competing for light and nutrients, and the rings might get wider when some other nearby trees were removed. Narrow rings can also show hardships for the tree like root damage from a machine or nearby construction.



If there's a forest fire, you may see a blackened line along the rings of one year (or more).



Scientists in Oregon used tree rings to find out that there used to be many more forest fires there than they used to think, but they were mild fires where most of the trees survived. They were able to look at tree rings from very old trees to learn about fires hundreds of years ago.

Rings will show if there used to be a branch in the tree, and insect infestations can also show damage to the tree that year. Even heavy winds or things that leaned against trees can become part of a tree's story in its rings.

Next time you find a tree stump or a fallen tree, see if you can read the rings to learn about the tree's life and what might have been happening all around it during its life!



Make Crab Apple Cider!

So many homes and parks have crab apple trees and so few people put these tasty, healthy little fruits to use. Here's a recipe to change all that! It's easy, packed with vitamins and antioxidants, and delicious.

I came up with this recipe to use up some crab apples that we got from friends one year. It tastes like a cross between apple cider and lemonade, and it's ruby red with just a hint of spice. And that bright red color means lots of disease-fighting, vitamin-rich nutrients too.

Of course, crab apples are like other apples in that they come in lots of different colors. You can use any color of crab apples that you find and they'll all be tasty and good for you! Remember that every tree has slightly different tasting crab apples so you can also try from all different trees to find the one you like best!

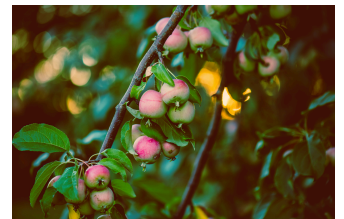
Be sure to gather your crab apples from trees that have not been sprayed.

Here's all you do...

Alicia's Easy Crab Apple Cider

1. Find yourself a park where foraging is allowed (fruits usually are for personal use) or a friend with a crab apple tree. Pick a bunch!
2. Wash them and remove the stems and blossom ends. Cut into quarters.
3. Put them in a big pot and cover them with water. Bring to a boil and simmer until they are very tender and they have lost much of their color.
4. Line a strainer with some cheesecloth and scoop it into the strainer over a big bowl. Squeeze the juice out of the crab apples and add the crab apples to the compost pile.
5. Return the liquid to the pan and add sugar (or other sweetener) to taste. Bring back to a simmer to dissolve the sugar and add some water if it's too strong. If it's not strong enough, simmer to reduce it until it's just right.

Serve warm (our favorite way) or chill.

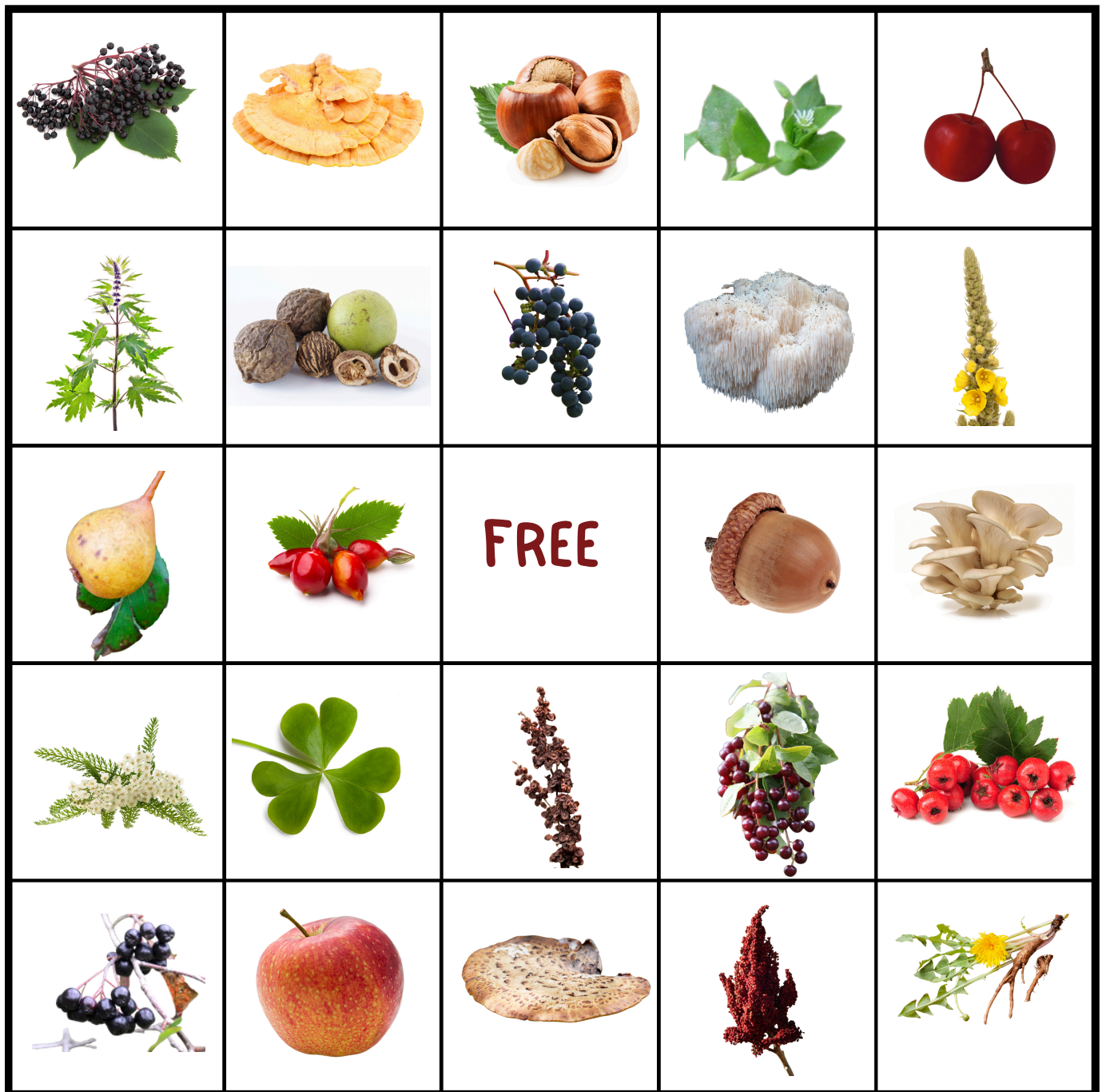


Fall Foraging Bingo

How to Play: See how many of these wild edible and medicinal plants you can spot this fall. You might find them in parks, roadsides or even your own yard. Make an x over the ones you spot and try to get a BINGO either across, down, or diagonally.

This is just a tiny fraction of the wild edible and medicinal plants to forage in fall!
Not all of these may be found in your area, so feel free to substitute similar ones in your area.

The plants and mushrooms are: Elderberries, chicken of the woods mushrooms, hazelnuts, chickweed, crabapples, motherwort, walnuts, wild grapes, lion's mane mushrooms, mullein, wild pears, rose hips, acorns, oyster mushrooms, yarrow, wood sorrel, dock seeds, choke cherries, hawthorn berries, aronia (chokeberries), apples, dryad's saddle mushrooms (also known as pheasant back), staghorn sumac, dandelion root



Pretty. Perilous Pokeberries

Remember, our theme for our featured plants this year in Wild Kids is dangerous plants. One of my favorite plants to forage in September is considered a dangerous plant. Poke berries are poisonous to people but they are wonderful for doing wild crafts like making ink and dye.

The poke plant (*Phytolacca americana*) has been used for food and medicine by people in Appalachia and beyond for hundreds of years (and probably a lot longer!) but it is not a safe plant for people to forage if they don't know how to use it safely.

In the old days, people made something called poke sallet (sometimes called poke salad) from it, and some people still do. Some people use it very carefully for a pain medicine today, too. It is a plant you need to learn all about from someone who has experience with it, though, because it can make you very sick if you eat it.

We love using poke berries for art and for crafts though!

You can crush the berries and paint with a feather quill or a paintbrush to make beautiful pictures or write letters.

I even have a picture of a homemade feather paintbrush painting with pokeberry ink on the cover of my nature art book, Wild Art.

During the Civil War, soldiers used to write letters home to their loved ones with pokeberry ink. Some people even called poke berries inkberries because of that. The letters were very pretty because of the bright pinkish purple ink, but pokeberry ink is not very lasting so over a long time the letters faded away to blank pages!

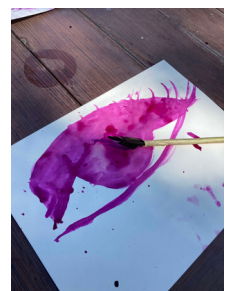
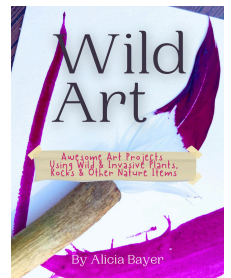
We sometimes smash fresh poke berries on white craft shirts to make temporary tie dye shirts (some stains will remain, but not as bright and bold after washing).

Other times, we paint with homemade paintbrushes and pokeberry ink.

Poke is a native plant that grows wild all over the United States and Canada, especially in the East, and in lots of other places around the world. The berries are a food source for lots of songbirds like gray catbird, northern mockingbird, northern cardinal, and brown thrasher.



If you want to do crafts with pokeberries, be sure to have help from an adult who knows about them. Wear gloves when you handle them (they stain everything, and a few people have reported getting a rash from poke plant). Make sure you have permission to do it, and protect your area from stains.



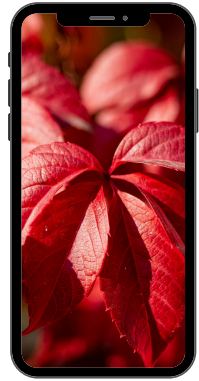
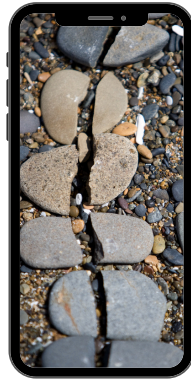
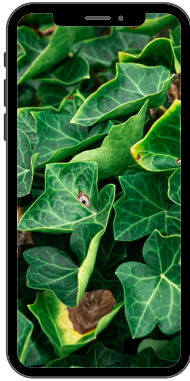
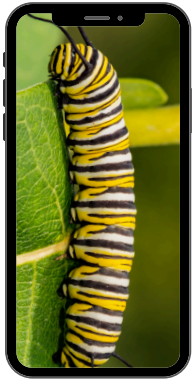
POKE
(*Phytolacca americana*)



September

Nature Photo Prompts

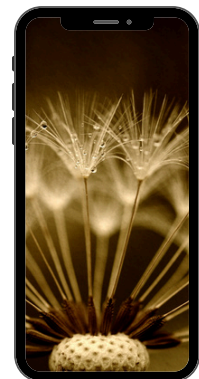
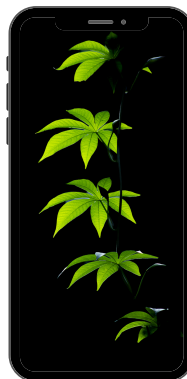
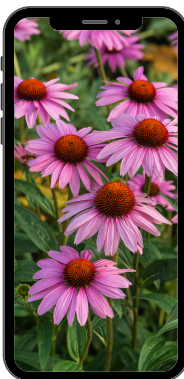
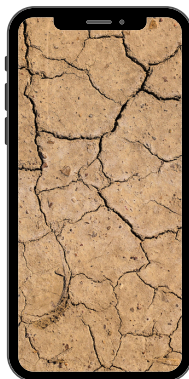
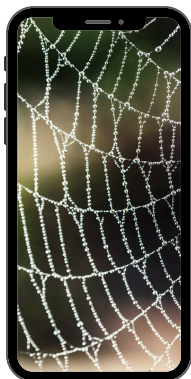
Try to head outside and take a picture each day with that day's prompt as an inspiration!



- 1 Parallel
- 2 Starts with S
- 3 Tiny
- 4 Red
- 5 Reflection
- 6 Ground
- 7 Pattern
- 8 Web
- 9 Fragile
- 10 Many

- 11 Sharp
- 12 Light
- 13 Broken
- 14 Grayscale
- 15 Colorful
- 16 Smooth
- 17 Sky
- 18 Leaf
- 19 Ground
- 20 Round

- 21 Insect
- 22 Hidden
- 23 Tracks
- 24 Edible
- 25 Invasive
- 26 Stripes
- 27 Pink
- 28 Seeds
- 29 Wet
- 30 Bumpy



September Poetry



Autumn

by Florence Hoatson

Yellow the bracken,
Golden the sheaves,
Rosy the apples,
Crimson the leaves;
Mist on the hillside,
Clouds grey and white.
Autumn, good morning!
Summer, good night!

Under the Willow

by Leroy F. Jackson

Put down your pillow under the willow,
Hang up your hat in the sun,
And lie down to snooze as long as you choose,
For the plowing and sowing are done.

Pick up your pillow from under the willow,
And clamber out into the sun.
Get a fork and a rake for goodness' sake,
For the harvest time has begun.

Mr. Scarecrow

by Sheila Braine



There's a ragged old man in the garden to-day,
And Gardener, laughing, says there he can stay;
His coat is in tatters, he wears an old hat,
And the birds do not like him, I'm quite sure of that.

They chatter, chit-chatter up there in the tree,
And aren't half as friendly as they used to be;
But Gardener says: "That's a good job, indeed!
If it weren't for that old man, they'd have all my seed!"

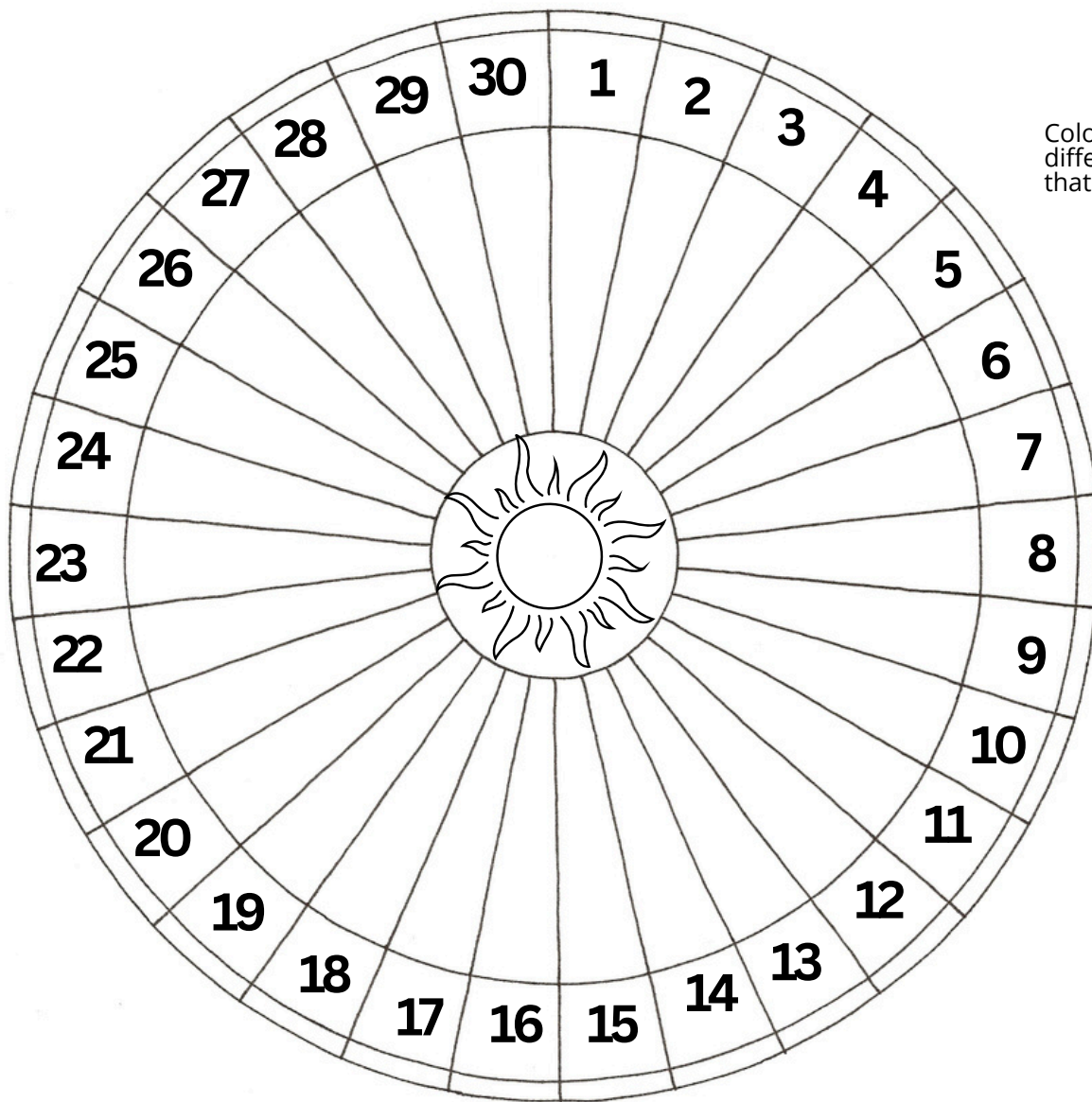


September Temperature Wheel

Make a picture record of the range of temperatures this month!

Each day at a certain time (like when you wake up, or at noon), find out what the temperature is outside. Write the temperature in that spoke of the wheel and then color that area to represent the temperature range (like blue for in the 60s).

At the end of the month, look back and see what trends you can see for the month.



Key

Color each circle with a different color to represent that temperature range

- ☐ 30's
- ☐ 40's
- ☐ 50's
- ☐ 60's
- ☐ 70's
- ☐ 80's
- ☐ 90's
- ☐ 100's

My Nature Journal

September



September 2026



PHENOLOGY CALENDAR



Keep track of firsts and special events in nature this month!

Here are some examples of what you might observe:

- First frost of the season
- Migrating geese spotted
- Maple leaves turning gold
- Crabapples are ripe
- Record high temperatures



- First asters blooming
- Wild grapes foraged
- Rose hips collected
- Black eyed Susan (rudbeckia) seeds gathered and scattered

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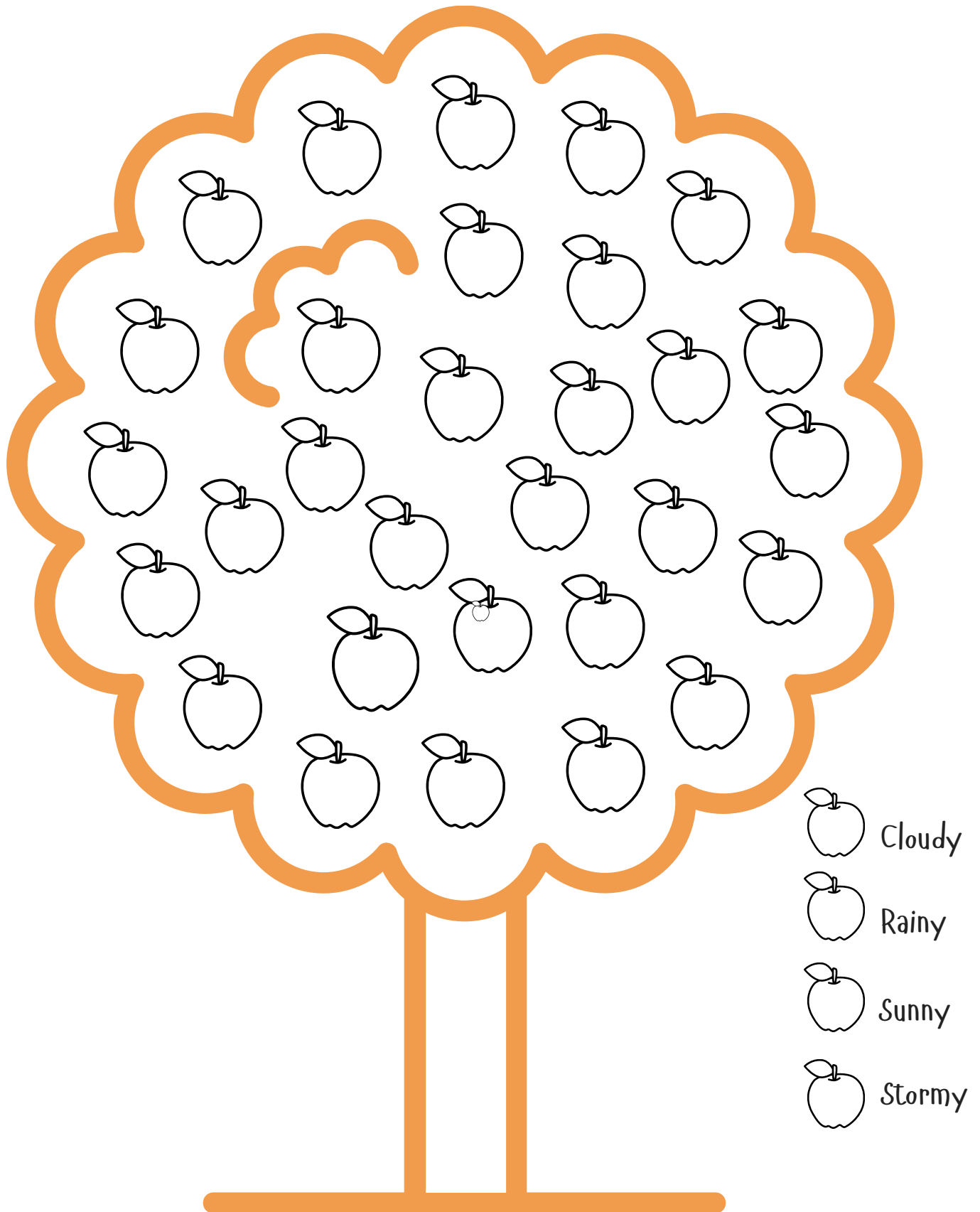
T

F

S

		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

September Weather Tree



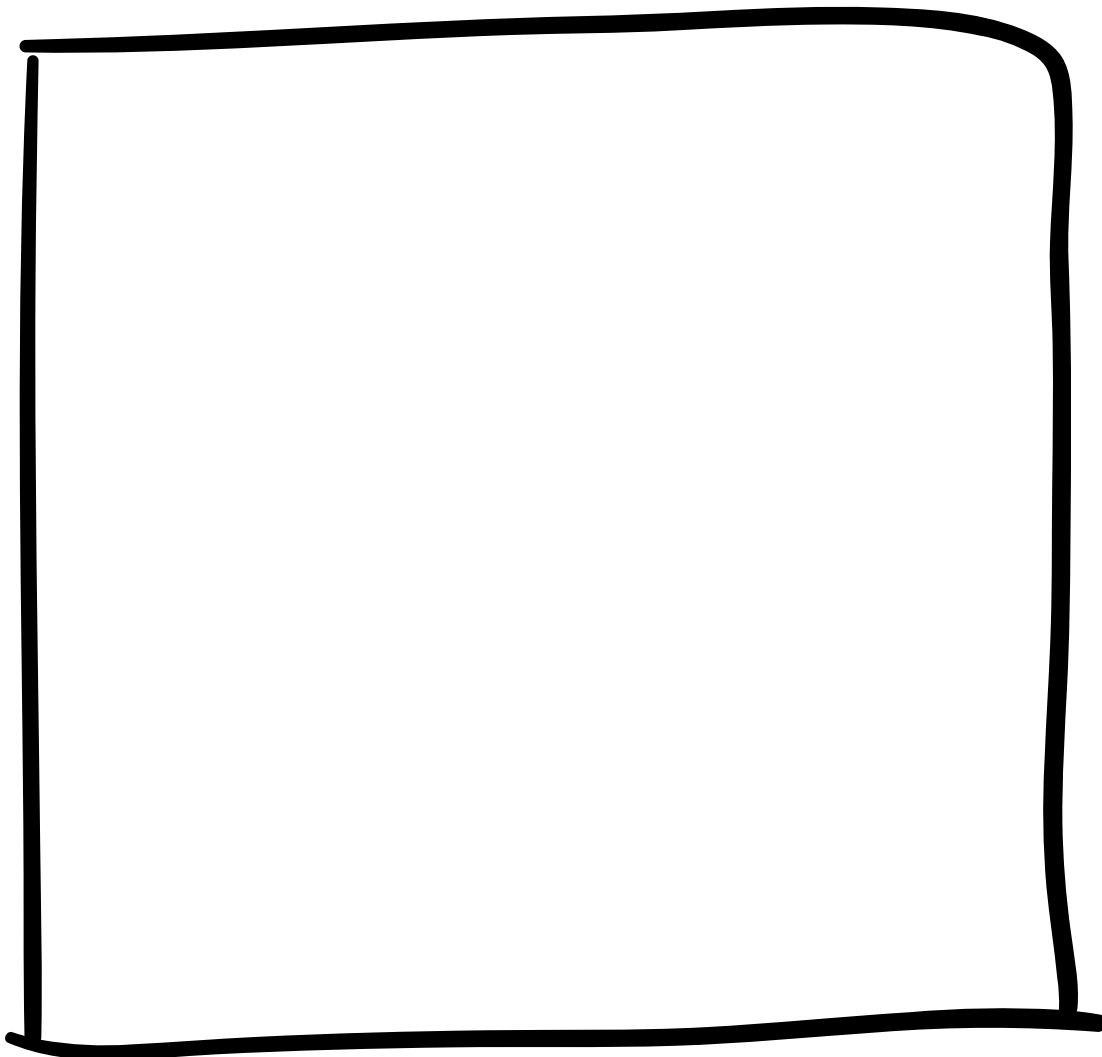
Nature Study Close Up

I found: _____

Latin name: _____

Where found: _____

Date/Time of Day: _____



Notes: _____

September Bird List

Birds spotted this month

September Animal List

Mammals, reptiles & other wildlife spotted this month

September 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!

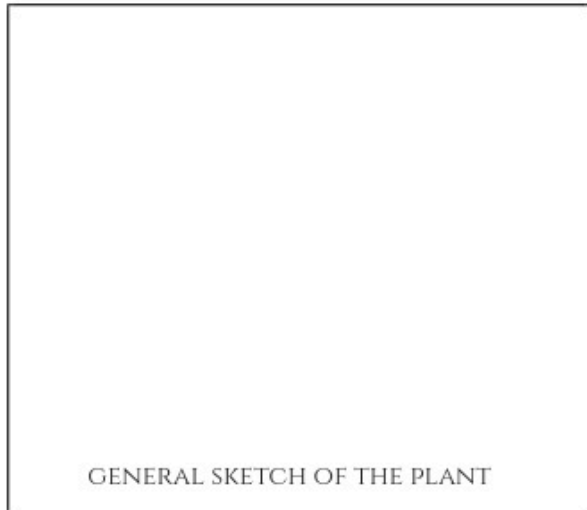
Week 1 Observations

Week 2 Observations

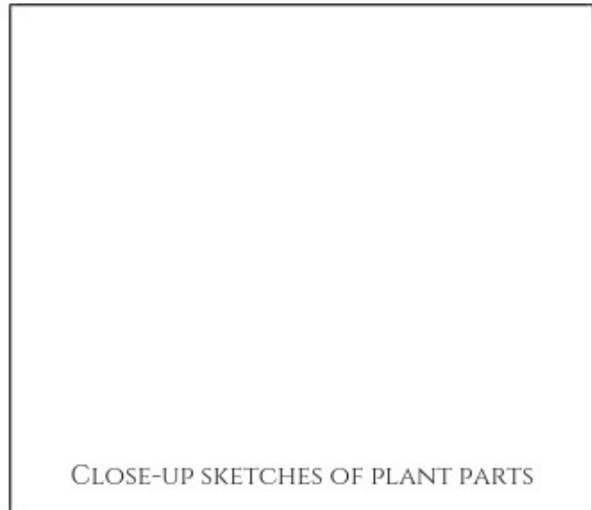
Week 3 Observations

Week 4 Observations

MY FORAGING GUIDE FOR:



GENERAL SKETCH OF THE PLANT



CLOSE-UP SKETCHES OF PLANT PARTS

LATIN NAME _____

WHERE FOUND _____

PARTS USED _____

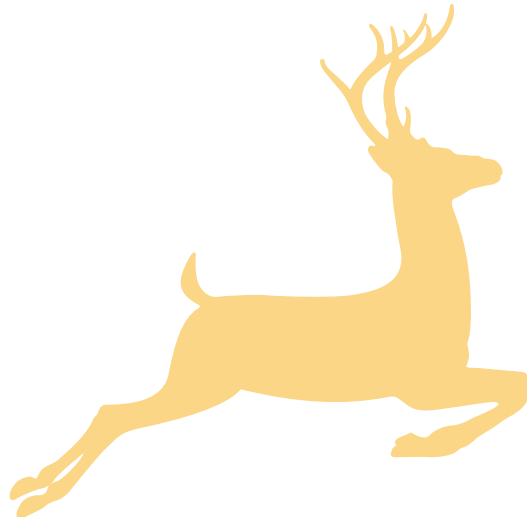
LOOKALIKES & HOW TO POSITIVELY ID:

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.