

Living Things and the Environment: Day 2

This week, Weekday Wonders will help young scientists explore ecosystems and the world around them. They will start by learning about living and nonliving things, then find out more about the needs of plants and animals. Toward the end of the week, young scientists will discover how plants and animals rely on each other and determine how the parts of an ecosystem share resources.

These curated activities are listed in a suggested sequence but may be done in the order that works best for you and your young scientists. Learn more about this series in the <u>Introduction to Weekday Wonders.</u>



Question of the Day What do animals need to live?



Daily Nature Journal

Have your young scientists go outside and complete their daily nature journaling. Use the <u>Guide to Nature Journaling</u> to remind them of the format or to create a template for them. This is a great practice for adults, too! What do they see, hear, and smell outside today?



Animals All Around

Have your young scientists look for animals in the area around where you live. Remind them to look on the ground, in the air, and in trees and bushes. They should look for small animals,

such as ants, bees, or butterflies, and larger animals, such as birds or dogs. Young scientists should keep a count of how many animals they find.

Once they have found as many animals as they can, ask your young scientist to pick one animal to study a little further. Ask them to look around the area to see how they think the animal gets food and water and where it sleeps and stores food. Consider asking them what evidence they have—what they observed—that helped them decide on their ideas.

You may wish to extend this activity by having your young scientists do research on the animal to find out what it eats, drinks, and the type of shelter it uses. Discuss if their observations matched their research.



Nature Journal

Ask your young scientists to imagine they are squirrels. Have them write about where they might find food, water, and shelter in the outdoor area they are observing. Ask if the shelter

has space for both sleeping and storing food and have them write about how a squirrel might do those activities.



Squirrel Snacks

Preparation: Gather a supply of small objects that you have a lot of, such as coins, paper clips, crayons, or plastic eggs. Alternately, print and cut apart the sheet of acorns found on

page 3. Ask your scientist to stay in one room while you hide the "acorns" in another part of the house or the yard. If you have multiple scientists, hide enough acorns so each one has plenty to find. Be sure to keep track of how many you hide!

Activity: Once you have hidden the acorns, tell your young scientists that they will try to be a squirrel for the day. Show them an example of the type of objects you hid and tell them that these are acorns, the food that squirrels eat.

First, each squirrel should decide on a spot to serve as a shelter to hide the "acorns." Then send the squirrels to gather acorns so they can store some food away. But, as squirrels, they are only able to carry *two acorns at a time* to their shelter. You can end the gathering after a certain time or when the squirrels have found all the acorns. Have your young scientists count the number of acorns they gathered.

Bonus: Serve your young scientists a snack of small crackers, raisins, or nuts. Tell them to continue pretending they are squirrels as they eat by nibbling the edges of the snack.



Nest Necessities

In Squirrel Snacks, young scientists decided on a place to store their acorns. Now, they can explore more about squirrel nests. One type of nest that squirrels make is a leaf nest. These can be found 6-7 meters (20 feet) up in trees in the fork of a branch. If there are large trees nearby, have your young scientists look for these large nests. If not, consider finding a picture of one on the Internet.

Leaf nests are made of twigs, leaves, moss, and other materials. First, twigs are loosely woven together to make a floor. Then, squirrels pack damp leaves and moss on top of the floor to add extra stability. They use more twigs, moss, leaves, and sometimes even paper to build up an outer shell, stuffing materials together to make it stronger. Finally, they add leaves, shredded bark, and grass to the inside of the nest.

Challenge your young scientist to build a squirrel nest with materials they collect outside, such as twigs, leaves, and grass, or from around the house, such as paper, string, and egg cartons. Encourage them to be creative! The youngest scientists might use a bowl to hold their materials together. Older scientists can practice their engineering skills by trying to keep their materials together in a spherical nest shape without mud or glue. Challenge them to try to make a sturdy nest that does not fall apart easily.

Squirrel Snacks Acorns

